

Revolutionary

Perspectives

19



Yugoslavia

**From Iron Fist to Velvet Glove
No Change for the Working Class**

Middle East "Peace" Continues it's Bloody Course

The 1923 March Action in Germany

Wheen's Biography of Marx

Slavery and Child Wage Labour

The Euro

The Petrol Blockade

Revolutionary Perspectives

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Palestine

Middle East on the Brink

The first few weeks of October saw an explosion of fury and violence engulf the Palestinian territories and Israel itself. At the time of writing at least 100 people have been killed. All but 4 have been Palestinians. The Israeli army has gone on an orgy of violence which has included the use of helicopter gunships, tanks and even gunboats against civilians many of whom were children. Though this violence was sparked by the visit of the Likud leader, "butcher" Sharon, to the Temple Mount in Jerusalem, this was only the spark which ignited an explosive situation. The principal causes of

barbaric response of the Israeli regime may well have hammered the final nail into the coffin of the Oslo peace process. The Israeli contempt for the Oslo accords, shown by their refusal to honour what they have agreed to, reveals the bankruptcy of the process. What comes next?

Pax Americana

To understand where we are to day it is necessary to briefly recall where the Oslo accords came from and what they represent. The material cause of the conflict in Pales-

version the Nazi policies of *Lebensraum* and *Drang nach Osten*. Though this was the root of the problem, serious battles only developed once each side found imperialist powers to back it. From the start, the battles which have engulfed the Middle East have been proxy ones between the major imperialist powers which emerged from the second world war, namely the US and Russia. However, when the Soviet Union collapsed in 1991 the US found itself as the sole super-power and thus the arbiter of the Palestinian conflict. In the late 80's the Palestinian uprising against the Israeli State, the



More murder in the "Peace Zone", more blood on capital's hands

this anger were the deteriorating living conditions of the Palestinian masses, the creeping annexation of their so-called "Territory", the repressive and corrupt regime of Arafat and the farce of the so-called "peace process." The

tine is, of course, the Israeli expropriation of Palestinian lands and their expulsion of millions of Palestinians from these lands to make way for Israeli settlers. This was the Israeli

Intifada had proved almost impossible for the Israelis to control, and it was under these circumstances that the Oslo agreement of 1993 was dreamed up.

The arrogance of the Israelis and their US masters is revealed by the stupidity, even in bourgeois terms, of this agreement. The "land for peace" formula amounted to the creation of a Palestinian "Bantustan" of which even Verwoerd, the architect of South African apartheid, would have been proud. Scraps of disconnected territory inside Israel, with minimal resources, poor infrastructure and desperate poverty, were to provide cheap labour for Israeli factories. Within these areas Palestinian leaders with their own forces of repression were to keep the disgruntled masses in check, and ensure the regular flow of labour required by Israeli capitalism. In return these leaders, namely Arafat and what Palestinians call the "class of Oslo", were to receive enormous bribes. This was the grand scheme. However, as if this was not bad enough, the Israelis continued to build settlements within the territories they were supposed to be giving back. This involved, further expropriation of Palestinian land and houses to make way for the settlements and the roads which link them to Israel proper. By the end of the decade the so-called "Palestinian Territories" were littered with over 200 such settlements. The Israelis wanted to have their cake and eat it. For his part, Arafat duly imposed Israeli order on his people, filling his gaols with the opponents of Israel and the Oslo accords. He dutifully attended fruitless negotiations year after year while the deadlines set by the Oslo accords came and went without the required return of territory taking place. Arafat made concession after concession. However, the final concessions dictated by Clinton and Barak at the Camp David summit in July proved too much. Arafat realised that he could never survive if he made such capitulations. This has led to the present situation and the present violence.

After the violence of recent weeks the Israeli and US rulers have to decide between trying to resurrect the Oslo process or finding another solution. Resurrecting the Oslo agreement will now be extremely difficult, however, the alternatives which are either annexation of Palestinian lands and expulsion of the Palestinians, or the incorporation of Palestinian territories and the Palestinians in a single secular

state, are also enormously difficult for the Israeli ruling class. Further annexation and mass expulsion of Palestinians is unlikely to be permitted by the US outside of a regional war, which the US, is keen to avoid. The creation of a secular state would involve the jettisoning of Zionism, which the Israeli ruling class is not able to do at present. In bourgeois terms this is the only feasible long-term solution. The most likely short term outcome is a "No war No peace" fudge, whereby the Oslo agreement remains nominally alive while the policy of creeping annexation, and the policy establishing what the Israeli bourgeoisie like to call "facts on the ground" continues.

The disarray of US imperialism over Palestine has given an opportunity to the European Union to try and assert its imperialist interests in the area. It is significant that Arafat turned to the EU, and in particular France, to try and win support for his declaration of statehood, after the failure of Camp David. He has also insisted that the EU foreign policy chief Javier Solana attend the peace summit at Sharm el Sheikh. The seeds of further imperialist conflict already exist. Obviously the EU is not yet able to oppose the US hegemony over the area. It is, however, able to play a spoiling role and put a spoke in the US plans.

Protégé of Imperialism

The State of Israel owes its existence to the machinations of world imperialism. The Zionist movement, which had previously been of little significance, was given a massive boost by the Jewish refugee crisis at the end of the Second World War. The Zionist state declared in 1948 was backed from the outset by the US which was anxious to extend its influence in the Middle East and snuff out the embers of British colonialism in the region. (Palestine had been ruled by the British under a League of Nations mandate, following the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, after the First World War) As the protégé of US imperialism, Israel has been its most loyal servant ever since, particularly during the cold war period. Because of its importance to US strategic interests Israel has been able to perpetrate the most

appalling crimes against the Palestinian Arabs from massacres and expulsions in 1948, the occupation of the West Bank and Gaza in 1967, imprisonment, torture and travel restrictions through to the current wave of killings by the Israeli army. The "peace process" only got underway after the collapse of the Soviet Union and the ability of Russia to hold any real sway in the Middle East. In this new climate the US had no need for an Arab/Israel conflict. At the same time the Americans would not try to impose conditions that the Israeli government could not accept. Post-Oslo, the peace process has been driven not by what may be an equitable solution (at least in bourgeois terms) but by the imperatives of Israeli intransigence and paranoia. Thus after 7 years the idea of "land for peace" has resulted in very little land being transferred to the Palestinians and zero peace, the current level of violence being higher than during the *Intifada* of the 1980's.

A One-Sided Deal

The recent outbreak of Palestinian protests is an expression of growing anger which reflects a worsening situation on several levels. The shambolic affair, which is Arafat's Palestine National Authority (PNA), still does not control even half of the West Bank. The Israelis have resolutely failed to concede East Jerusalem and Arafat has found it politically inexpedient to accept the derisory offer of an anonymous Jerusalem suburb as an alternative capital. Even if the West Bank were to be handed over in the terms of the Camp David agreement set out in July of this year, the PNA would still have no territorial integrity. The West Bank is peppered with hundreds of Israeli Jewish settlements with a total population of 200 000 which, together with the roads, which connect them, would remain under Israeli control. Bizarre plans to link the West Bank with Gaza by flyovers would connect the two parts of the Palestinian State without the need for its citizens to traverse Israeli soil. Further, Camp David merely glossed over the question of the Palestinian refugees of which some 3.6 million live in surrounding Arab countries and are estimated to

constitute a quarter of the world refugee population. Arafat was prepared to scupper the hopes of the refugees that they may return to the homes they were expelled from in 1948 and 1967. The compromise deal was that the "International Community" would provide funds to assist the Diaspora, although Israel itself accepted no responsibility to pay compensation to those dispossessed. A very small number would be permitted to be reunited with their families in Israel on "humanitarian" grounds. What is perhaps surprising is that this issue in itself did not spark off massive protests before the current wave of protests broke out.

But the discontent is not just limited to frustrated national aspirations. Rather the main cause is the worsening material conditions of the Palestinian masses, partly as a consequence of the occupation, but also due to the geographic location of the Palestinian lands on the capitalist periphery and all the attendant problems associated with "Third World" economies. The situation is not assisted by the monumental corruption of the Arafat regime and excessive spending on security. The plans for the police originally envisaged a force of 7000 but this has mushroomed to 30 000, their main task to protect Arafat and his cronies from inevitable popular unrest. Since the 1993 Oslo accords Palestinian GNP has fallen by 35%. Average income in the West Bank and Gaza is \$1500 per capita compared with \$2500 in 1987 and \$17 000 in Israel. The UN has calculated unemployment at 17.9% but this is probably a conservative estimate. With regard to access to land and precious water resources there is also a massive inequality between Israel and the PNA. A recent report by the Applied Research Institute in Jerusalem calculates that whilst Israel with a population of around 6 million has access to 2 billion cubic litres of water, the Palestinians with a population half that size have access to a mere 232 million cubic litres*. It is clear that all the economic advantages rest with Israel.

A New Regional War?

There are several indications, apart from the number of deaths, that the situation is more seri-

ous than it has been for many years. For the first time the Arabs who live within Israel's officially recognised borders have joined in the protests and in the relatively cosmopolitan city of Tel-Aviv, Jewish mobs have smashed up Arab owned properties. There are also signs that the situation is escalating beyond the borders of Israel and the Occupied Territories. The kidnapping of Israeli soldiers in Lebanon by Hizbollah could in the present climate spark conflict between Israel and Hizbollah's backers Syria. There have been mass demonstrations in support of the Palestinians in most Arab capitals and in Yemen the British Embassy and an American warship have been bombed.

The serious nature of the situation can be gauged by the activities of the international bourgeoisie who have no interest at the present time in seeing a war in the Middle East which would inevitably jeopardise precious oil supplies. Moreover the prestige of Bill Clinton who has done so much to coerce the Palestinians into accepting a poor deal would be seriously damaged if the situation were to worsen, a prospect which would be most unwelcome with the US Presidential elections only a month away. So we have seen the usual suspects such as Madeline Albright and Kofee Annan and even second rate players such as Robin Cook scurrying to the Middle East to try to cobble together a deal to prevent further war. At the time of writing a meeting between the Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak and Yasser Arafat is about to take place but even the bourgeois commentators are sceptical that there can be any significant progress. Indeed all the signs are that the positions of the main protagonists can only become more entrenched. In Israel the ultra hawkish Ariel Sharon has been invited to join Barak's floundering coalition. This is the man whose deliberately provocative visit to Jerusalem's Temple Mount sparked off the current crisis. Yet this is a trivial misdemeanour for someone whose previous CV includes the massacre of Arab civilians and who as Defence Minister ordered the invasion of Lebanon in 1982 and whose forces looked on whilst their Christian militia allies perpetrated the notorious massacres of 2000 Pal-

estinians at the Sabra and Shatila refugee camps. On the Palestinian side it is unlikely that Yasser Arafat can now accept the compromises he has previously agreed without being swept aside by more militant nationalists or Islamic Fundamentalists.

As we have said before there can be no effective peace within the nation state framework, which effectively means within a capitalist framework. However the working class which is the only force capable of organising to overthrow capitalism is still effectively absent from the scene. This is not to decry the activities of the Palestinian masses whose protests are as much against worsening material conditions as they are in support of nationalist aspirations. However whilst class issues are confused with nationalist ones, the struggles will always be diverted away from class issues by bourgeois ideologues from supporters of "liberal democracy" to religious fundamentalists. This highlights the need for a revolutionary party which has the capability of intervening in the working class to establish a genuine revolutionary agenda for the abolition of capitalism and its attendant nationalist butchery.

*Statistics from *The Guardian* 14.10.00

Yugoslav Elections — No Gain for the Working Class

Milosevic and his replacement by the pro-European Kostunica, represent the defeat of Serbian nationalism and the beginning of the final stages in the re-orientation of Yugoslavia. The stability, which existed from the Second World War to the end of the 80s, was shattered by the economic crisis, the collapse of the eastern bloc and the Soviet Union. The bloody wars, which have ravaged the country in the last decade, have been part of a process of re-orientation of the country and the reformation of imperialist blocs. The rabid nationalism, which animated these wars, has disguised the fact that the republics, which broke from the Yugoslav Federation, have become clients of the EU. The Serbian bourgeoisie clung to nationalism, the dream of a Greater Serbia and their alliance with Russia. The Kosovo war shattered these dreams, exposed the weakness of Russia and the dead end to which this road was leading. The election of Kostunica represents the start to breaking the links with Russia and forging new ones with the EU. It is not accidental that already aid and the lifting of sanctions have been offered and Kostunica himself is attending the EU leaders' summit in Biarritz.

This process is, of course, presented with a barrage of anti-working class propaganda. Democracy, once again, has led to the 'death of communism', 'People Power' has triumphed and there has been yet another successful 'velvet revolution'. Yet behind the clichés, lies the stark reality of class dictatorship and the impossibility of any real democracy under imperialism.

The Dictator is Dead...

Milosevic's fall in many ways reflects the fact that no state can exist independently of imperialism or the global economy. At

his election in 1987 he was a Stalinist bureaucrat but his turn to nationalism came against a background of the deepening economic crisis in Serbia, which itself was a reflection of the deepening capitalist crisis globally. Inflation and unemployment were spiralling out of control (in 1989-90 inflation was 2000% and unemployment was officially 25% and some 80% of state owned industries were bankrupt). Milosevic's response to the crumbling of the Yugoslav Federation was to use nationalism as a war cry and try to annex territory from surrounding republics, and he was supported in this by the most backward and reactionary elements of Serb society, including the orthodox church, the peasantry and those bureaucrats who wanted to protect the privileges they had enjoyed at the head of the Yugoslav Federation. (It is worth noting here that Milosevic came to power democratically, by the very same democratic process which is now being hailed as revolutionary). Milosevic held power through a series of shifting coalitions and was helped by the fact that his opponents were split and weak. Many of them had similar aims to Milosevic and were unable to present any real alternative.

But Milosevic's downfall was not a purely domestic affair. His loss of power started on the international stage. His constant pushing for a Greater Serbia, and the four wars, which resulted, conflicted with the aims of powers like the US, Germany, Italy and the UK. Indeed the more Milosevic used Serbian nationalism as an excuse to attack his neighbours the more he was brought into direct conflict with Western states, all of whom had their own plans for the region (1). By the time of the Rambouillet agreement it was clear that the US and its allies wanted Milosevic out. The NATO bombing of Serbia had more to do with getting rid of him than their official rea-

son of supporting the Kosovan fight for independence (and it is no coincidence that as soon as Milosevic had gone the British Defence Secretary Robin Cook announced that the international community might now be 'less inclined' towards independence for Kosovo). The Serbian economy was eventually smashed by NATO bombs, and the sanctions, which followed, were a clear message to the Serb bourgeoisie that if they wanted aid for reconstruction they would have to get rid of Milosevic first. For his part Milosevic believed that sanctions would strengthen his position since he blamed the state of the Serbian economy on the aggression of the West. The urban middle class (who had never really given him their full backing anyway) began to call for a peace with the West and for the promised reconstruction programme as the first step to strengthening the economy for inward investment. Once the West made it clear there would be no aid as long as Milosevic remained president his days were numbered. He was isolated internationally (since Russia was too weak to defend him and had one eye on Western investment itself) and domestically he was in an increasingly untenable position. Unemployment was rife. The central bank was printing dinars in a desperate attempt to cover the budget deficit and buy currency for state businesses. This led to constant inflation. In the end the currency was so feeble it had been replaced by the German mark and industry could not survive. Just before the election Gazprom, the Russian gas monopoly, cut off gas supplies to Serbia because Belgrade owed \$400 millions in unpaid bills.

It was at this stage that the West, in particular the US, made it clear to Milosevic that they still had the power to defeat him militarily if they had to. NATO still has 22,000 S-For troops in

Bosnia and their K-For troops are still in Kosovo. Britain let it be known it has 15 warships in the Mediterranean and 10 others in the region; Robin Cook reminded Milosevic on the Monday before his fall that Western powers had a 'very substantial capacity in the region'. (2) If proof were needed that democracy is merely a fig leaf for naked bourgeois power then the Serb elections provide it. Five days after the election the US and Croatia, (which is angling for full NATO membership) undertook a series of military maneuvers in the region. A Croatian official made it clear that '...one cannot in all honesty say that this has nothing to do with Yugoslavia.' A US Colonel remarked that his soldiers were ready to invade Serbia 'if told so.' The New York Times on 6/10/00 admitted

the role of the US in determining the outcome of the election:

'...the spread of open societies in the Balkans and elsewhere...is the direct result of the expansion of American imperial authority.'

So much for freedom at the ballot box.

... Long Live the Dictator!

Enter Vojislav Kostunica, hailed by the West as the liberator of Serbia. What do we know about him? Well, he's a nationalist (like Milosevic), who left his previous party in 1992 because it wasn't nationalist enough, and went on to form the Democratic Party of Serbia who were nowhere until the West started to take

an interest in them. He is supported by a coalition (as was Milosevic); he opposed the NATO bombings (as did Milosevic) and he is opposed to independence for Kosovo or Montenegro (as was Milosevic). He also attacked NATO's peace plans including the '95 Dayton Accords for Bosnia (sound familiar?) However there is one major difference between him and Milosevic and that is the West believes they can do business with him.

The Balkans, being a key strategic area with raw materials and potential markets is of prime interest both to the US and Europe. Both are also interested in controlling oil routes and one of the proposals to bring oil and gas from the Caspian region via the

Caucasus to Europe is a pipeline through the former Yugoslavia. The US and Europe also want to open the Serbian economy to Western finance capital and Kostunica is prepared to pave the way for this. He aims to bring the budget deficit under control, impose cuts in public spending, increase taxation (including VAT) and begin a series of privatisations. The British are also desperate to clear the Danube, which is essential for European trade but which is still blocked with the bridges NATO bombed. It is no coincidence that Cook's opening speech to the new President was to tell him that Britain 'extends a swift, generous and welcoming hand' whilst in the next sentence he said they were eager to start work clearing the Danube. Above all the EU is working on the agenda of getting Serbia into the European sphere of influence. As an incentive Serbia has already been granted \$2 billions in aid with the promise of more to come, and Kostunica has already been invited by Chirac to the EU summit. There have also been immediate promises to lift the oil embargo and end the flight ban. The West is eager to get Serbia and Montenegro back into the fold of the IMF and the World Bank and therefore firmly under control.

This process will not be without its problems. Tensions are emerging already. The US has said it will make the ending of sanctions conditional on the arrest of Milosevic; Kostunica has made it quite clear he will not allow a 'fellow Serb' to be extradited to The Hague. He is already grumbling about Western interference in the elections, and he hinted he would not tolerate too much interference when he said:

'I think the crisis and arguments about our election results were unnecessary'. (3)

Moreover his alliance is unstable. He heads a coalition of 18 different parties, all of whom have their own agendas and have united only to defeat Milosevic. And although the West may suddenly be prepared to abandon the Kosovans, the Montenegro ruling coalition may not be so easy to ignore. They boycotted September's election and are still pushing towards independence, which Kostunica will oppose. He has also made it clear he

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**Northern Ireland: the Anglo-
American Charade
"Living" "Marxism"**

will demand greater rights for Serbs in Kosovo. And then there is Serbia's other neighbour, Bosnia. Kostunica opposed the Dayton Accords and he has called for a political union between Serbia and the Bosnian Serbs, a move that threatens to bring further instability to the region.

Despite what has been said above, there is a convergence of interests between Serbian capital and that of the EU, which will prove stronger than these obstacles? The integration of Serbia into the EU sphere will, of course, pose problems for the US, which wants to continue its hold over the region because of its strategic importance. For the US it is a stepping stone to the Bosphorus and the oil supplies of the Caucasus. It could prove invaluable in a post NATO situation.

The Working Class

And what about the working class in all this? They have held the key to the situation all along. They didn't support Milosevic or his wars (though it should be noted the unions did. The Alliance of Serbian Trades Unions was firmly behind Milosevic and only turned on him when it became clear he was finished). Moreover the working class were decisive in his downfall. The real end for him came when workers struck against him, especially the well-publicised strikes by 17,300 mineworkers and admin. Staff at Kolubara and the other strikes in the south where the police refused to take action against them. By attacking the parliamentary building and media buildings they also showed their disgust at the system as a whole. But we should be cautious here; this was far from the working class acting completely in its own interests. Workers were undoubtedly fighting in part against the appalling conditions they have had to face for years, but Western intervention played a part here too in using workers' anger for their own ends. The Germans intervened and called on the army and security forces not to use force against the protesters and workers were encouraged to strike against the election results by their bosses. The only Director who didn't support

the strikes — the head of Niteks textiles, is now being urged to quit by the Nis branch of the Serbian Radical party. And naturally, once they got the result they wanted, the bourgeoisie suddenly called for calm and an end to the unrest. Kostunica urged an end to class struggle with an immediate speech asking 'people who think differently to find ways to live together in one society.'

Kostunica may well want social peace but there is no guarantee he will get it, especially in the light of the economic restructuring which lies ahead in order to get Serbia fit for Europe and for the needs of international finance capital. Ultimately it will be the working class who will pay the price, as they have done so far, whichever President or party is in power. The working class in Serbia has shown it still has its strength to act despite years of attacks on it, and workers have shown they are unstoppable once they fight together. But they need to formulate their own political demands, create their own independent political organisations and fight for their own class interests, otherwise they will continue to be used by a capitalist system which is increasingly sliding into barbarism.

RT

Notes

1 The differing involvement of the imperialist powers has been described in other articles, and we have written extensively on the conflicts within the former Yugoslavia in RP1, RP11, RP14, IC11, IC17

2 Quoted in the *Financial Times* 3/10/00

3 Quoted in *The Independent* 7/10/00

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Agli orfani dello stalinismo i conti non tornano. Recensione del libro Intervista sul nuovo secolo di Eric J. Hobsbawm

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(inside back cover)

We are reproducing here two texts written by South American sympathisers of the IBRP under conditions of great difficulty.

Peru and the Decadence of Capitalism

The Peruvian case is a contemporary example of what Bukharin called an "unstable equilibrium with a negative outlook" which now characterises the state of world capitalist society. Peru is, in effect, an extreme case where the relationship of capital and power to the productive and subordinate classes has been modified in such a way that the labour force is obliged to produce more and more whilst receiving less and less. Also, in environmental and biological terms, the aggressive insertion of capital — with its sequential marginalisation, demographic explosion, irrational use of the land and natural resources — provokes an unsatisfied clamour for food and the means of life, followed by an immense disaster: the desertification of territory, the unleashing of intense distributive imbalances and population growth, the unnatural concentration of 70% of the population in the capital city (Lima), creating a demographic and territorial polarisation between the hyper-concentrated urban areas and the dispersed and super-marginalised rural populations, both forced to live in segregated sub-societies which demand ever more energy and means of life from an exhausted territory. The displacement of the crisis from capital's central zones — globalisation — has imposed such modification on relations between classes and the use of the available productive forces that the economic apparatus is less and less capable of meeting the most elemental needs, whose growth proceeds with an incessant rhythm. Over the last ten years, class relations have been restructured in such a way that the labour force and the environment today have to bear an increasingly disadvanta-

geous and exploitative treatment with a negative outlook. Following the changes produced in socio-economic organisation by the "left" governments of the populist Generals between the end of the '60's and throughout the '70's, which was characterised by concessions to the workers and the emergence of a new petty bourgeoisie, and after successive armed uprisings by left-wing sects in the '80's which attacked the supporting structures of the traditional power-wielding groups, the bourgeoisie, via the Fujimorist tyranny, enforced a new equilibrium between capital and the subordinate classes to the detriment of the latter. Distinguished by a Caesarist "right" populism, the balance sheet of Fujimori's administration could not be more pleasing for the bourgeoisie: all the conditions for capital's centralisation of the social surplus in its hands — and, especially, the suppression of the concessions of State capitalism — have been achieved.

The coming of Fujimori into government came at the sharpest period of crisis for the institutional parties (particularly the American Popular Revolutionary Alliance founded by V. R. Haya de la Torre in the '30's). This aspect of his rise shows strong analogies with that of other South American statesmen over the last fifteen years. In effect, the bankruptcy and loss of legitimacy of the parties gathering the masses, creating consensus and integrating social movements, coincided with the ascension of all kinds of political adventurers who claim to provide the bourgeoisie's requirement of governability. Being free of all control and party discipline, the new groups had no difficulty in making the administra-

tion of power a question of personal profit. Alongside them has grown a market for gendarmes and specialists in death, whose chances of obtaining positions depended on their capacity to assess opportunities to use force at a time when a statesman's success was proportional to his ability as an executioner. In this vicious, non-institutionalised atmosphere, in which, given that the normal or democratic methods lacked efficiency, there reigns a great confusion over what are State requirements and what the legal system concedes to the State, an empire of political police is established and bourgeois governors borrow models for exercising power from the Mafioso system. Here sinister and unscrupulous personalities rise to the greatest stature. Vladimiro Ilich Montesinos, Security Advisor to the Fujimori government, is one of them. His biography is already comparable in some aspects to the now classic biography of Fouché. Like the latter, he has managed to survive the change of three political régimes, successively rising and falling with them; he obscurely entered history during the military revolution of Juan Velasco Alvarado, he obtained his police skills under the democratic republic following the return of Belaúnde Terry and the debut of Alan García and he has reigned behind the throne set up by the tyrant Fujimori. The crimes and pillaging attributed to him are certainly cruel and numerous, but are not enough to hide and wash away the sins committed by which the hypocritical bourgeoisie in giving him the position of defender of their régime.

For a long time, in the shadow of tyranny, the political calculations of the bourgeoisie have had, in effect, Machi-

Colombia

The State Strike or the Squandering of the Workers' Movement

The General Framework for the New Bourgeois Measures, the Reaction of the Masses and the Imperialist Promises

In Colombia, the process of insurrection has been unleashed by the capitalist mechanisms and the extension and exacerbation of the conflict between two bourgeois military fronts. This inferno also involves a struggle for total control over the drugs business, in an exceptional situation in where the imperialist bourgeoisie and

the marginalised of Colombia and other neighbouring countries are fighting a ferocious battle. If the former have, in the multibillion drugs business, a means to expand their superprofits, the latter have found in the hallucinogens which sedate the inhabitants of the metropolises, the "gold of the poor", a sure path to the El Dorado of capitalist wealth which up until now they had only contemplated on their TV screens. In the midst of these forces is the proletariat, subjected to the worst aggression in history from the bosses' front, amongst which are directly situated the capitalist groups, the parties of all colours, the State and imperialism with all its rival currents. In other

words, the masses are under attack and driven to despair on two easily identifiable fronts: on one side, the economic mechanisms of the crisis, the intensification of competition, the shrinking of markets; on the other, the aggressive escalation of imperialism and its military fronts which wish to impose greater levels of submission and exploitation through terror, on the one hand, democracy, modernity and the "fight against drugs", on the other, a strange genre of "socialism" where commodities, money, social classes and of course the State remain supreme. All these conditions exasperate the masses and catapult them in rebellion against the established "order", but

Peru

Continued from previous page

avellian reasoning as their basis. Faced with the necessity to concentrate wealth and confront the institutional debacle posed by the wasteful old methods of domination, the bourgeoisie have had to carry out a complex task. First, remove what was considered an inviolable and eternally achieved status from the superior sections of the subordinate classes, introducing innovations into society which would destroy their customs and traditional ways of life, second, redirect political life to respect the limits of a game imposed by a political system which was more concentrated in the executive and more tightly coordinated with the financial oligarchy. The establishment of a climate of terror which converts the new rules wanted by the bourgeoisie into concrete reality, which no-one dares to question, was the means to achieve its objectives. On the one hand, it had to impose new customs and, on the other, exorcise any resistance. For their part,

the dominated had to learn to measure the value of their obedience in proportion to the strength of their masters.

To maintain their prestige, while wading in rivers of blood and deadly persecution which it had to unleash, the bourgeoisie quickly learnt the convenience of abstaining from acting directly. It needed, in short, to create a monster to bear the responsibility of this task, and in its shadow, carry out, apparently without responsibility, the reforms it needed to achieve. This operation has brought it clear advantages: by the end of the tyranny, its rules have become customs, and all the loathing and hate generated by its establishment have fallen upon the persons of Fujimori and his officers, dying with them. In effect, believing in improvement, the masses will be content to change masters. In this way, the bourgeoisie has once again managed to shift the workers' social struggles from the terrain of the class struggle to be

absorbed in the inter-bourgeois political competition. And once on the terrain of democracy, of bourgeois institutionalisation, the masses will once again be polarised around the models of economic and political management which divide the bourgeoisie. Independently of the particular fortune of the Fujimori and Montesinos, the balance sheet clearly shows that the bourgeoisie has once again got what it wanted. The tyranny has succeeded in imposing, so far successfully, a new equilibrium between the classes on an inferior basis, to the detriment of the workers. Here the symptoms of decadence are visible. Countries like Peru, Ecuador, Colombia are, therefore, an early projection of the future which awaits a society wracked by crisis, a future which the negative trend taken by capitalism all over the world brings ever closer.

these conditions alone do not make them revolutionaries.

Current reality in fact presents, in effect, three facets which in conjunction produce one of the most curious and peculiar situations. The first consists of the anticapitalist rebellion which responds to automatic mechanisms. The second corresponds to the reaction against imperialist colonisation, embodied in the yanqui functionaries who today practically govern Colombia; in the development of the anti-worker and contra insurgent strategy, the multinationals have situated their headquarters in Bogotá. The third is represented by a proletariat which, without a revolutionary political past, and without strong traditions of anti-capitalist struggle, has today become a solitary giant, seized by anger and frustration, but without communist class consciousness, trying to oppose the confronting bands with its powerful arms. In these circumstances there remains only the Stalinists and traditional reformist left to occupy the entire vacuum of political leadership left by history. They claim to be the vanguard of the social response, no longer just against the attack of the establishment and its parties on the workers, but also for the marginalised who believe that, by the production of narcotics and their trafficking, they have found their ticket to paradise. The communist party and programme shine by their absence.

The proletariat does not need to justify itself nor invoke reasons to rebel, its own existence should provide the arguments and motivation for its movement. However, unfortunately, in the real world the proletariat does not live on its own, without the blight of bourgeois influences. To fully acquire its historical, revolutionary attitude, the proletariat requires no other condition than to grow and strengthen itself via an organisation which concentrates its will and hones its disposition to combat to the maximum. But first and foremost it has to sweep away its political adversaries. On Thursday 3rd of August this was made completely clear. The new strike in the State sector under a trade union leadership intoxicated by the anachronistic idea of maintaining a layer of dignified government functionaries above the rest of the

working class, has revealed the historic bankruptcy of trade unionism and the forces of the left bourgeoisie which have no programme other than that of class collaboration and conciliation. Their sole political formula consists of telling to the politically virgin and incautious mass of proletarians who joined the demonstrations to be a tame flock. The behaviour of the unions and "workers' parties" reminds us of the eternal counter-revolutionary strategy; "if you cannot prevent nor control the mass movement, then you must lead it."

The left and the unions have lead the proletariat along the path of Golgotha, along the path of renunciation which means the final acceptance of the Calvary which the hateful established order has in store for it. In spite of the fact that the initial call of the union leadership was too limited, the disorganised proletarian masses came out to express their pain and misery which they could no longer keep pent up in the huts where they live. In fact some 1 200 000 people, most of them not involved in work in the State sector, mobilised in more than 1000 municipalities against the policies of the government and the bosses. The biggest demonstration took place in Bogotá D.C. with some 200 000 demonstrators, which, over-controlled by the union police, resigned itself to chanting litanies, holding back its anger. On this occasion we have a new testament to the fact that the fear of the unionists towards this mass is as great as that which the bourgeoisie itself feels instinctively: both know that this is what gives body and form to revolutions and large scale actions. The masses demand immediate solutions, not diplomacy. Still hampered by ideological veils, they dream of a new world free of pain, oppression and misery, but when they dare to claim it, they are only given the old, rotten world dressed in reformist costume. True, on the 3rd of August, there were battles, but the masses who gathered around them were moved by the same blind fury as a hurricane, not knowing where to creatively direct their extraordinary strength. In the city of Popayán, in the South West of the country, in Cali, in the West, in Medellín, in Chinchina and Manizales in the coffee producing region, there were pitched battles

between demonstrators and the police, with dozens of wounded and arrested. In other cities there were barricades and disturbances on a smaller scale. Everywhere the proletariat demonstrated its anger, but this is not enough: it is still necessary to draw up a grand battle plan which shows the path which leads to its revolutionary dictatorship. The absence of a real communist party on the proletarian political scene opens the way for the reformist answer, which in Colombia is as bloody as the political phase of revolution itself, but without any of the essential transformations which would result in the realisation of the communist programme.

War and Reform

War and capitalist social reform are two intimately linked moments of the counter-revolutionary process being carried out in Colombia.

The labour reform project contemplates:

- The elimination of the right to collective negotiation.
- Suppression of overtime payment, working nights, Sundays and Holidays.
- The establishment of an integrated wage for those with a salary equal or greater than three times the minimum wage.
- Reduction of working time to 36 hours per week, with a proportional reduction in salary.
- In turn, the social security reform project proposes:
- An increase in the pensionable age to 65 for men, 62 for women.
- Elimination of special and exceptional pension schemes (Telecom, Ecopetrol, Teaching, Armed Forces).
- Increasing the working time necessary to gain the right to a pension from 1000 to 1300 weeks.
- Reduction of the percentage amount for pension income from 75% to 50% of earnings, thus clearly reducing the worth of pensions.
- Elimination of pension substitution (according to which the partner of the deceased retired person inherits the pension), so widows and widow-

ers will remain without any means to guarantee their subsistence at an age when they most need it.

The grave threat posed by the new projects of "Labour Reform" and "Social Security reform" as well as the complementary proposal to combat unemployment through the reduction of the wages of new workers contracted to half of the legal minimum wage in place up to now¹, and the compulsory distribution of actual working time amongst twice as many workers, obliging them to work half the time for half the salary at a faster rate, has spontaneously brought onto the streets hundreds of thousands of potential soldiers in the class struggle. Such "solutions" would have been conceived bearing in mind the figure of 21 million people who live below the poverty line (in fact, over the last two years a million new members have joined Colombia's pariah army, as well as the three million plus unemployed who walk the streets of the cities. It does not entail a step up for the "absolutely miserable" to a lesser grade of poverty, but the descent of those at this latter level to that of absolute misery. Apart from the crude worsening of the attack on the world of labour, the size of the 3rd of August mobilisation was also in part due to the approval of the "Colombia Plan" by the government and the Congress of the USA, which involves an omnicomprehensive counter-insurgency plan backed by \$1 600 000 000 with the aim of suppressing all resistance to the process of economic globalisation by the multinationals. The promise is the birth of a Happy New World in which Colombians will be complete "world citizens" as free and equal as their "peers" Ken Dan-Ren in Asia, Agnelli and Manesmann in Europe and Bill Gates in North America. Naturally, no imperialist promise comes for free. And today the price we have to pay is high because in the words of a well known preacher "our sins are great and we have to do penance for them before we enter the Kingdom of Heaven". After the purifying Calvary of war, the USA and its Colombian puppet government promise us the transformation of this region of the world into an Eden like paradise where we will all participate on equal terms, according to our free

will in the business universe alongside Exxon, Dupont, Monsanto, Ford, Mitsubishi, Rockefeller and company.

The current projects and reforms which caused the 3rd of August protest are amongst the final blows which have fallen on the working class in succession since the 80's, thanks to the State and the bosses. Since that time, the implacable offensive against the economic and political conditions of the working class has known no pause. Thanks to the control over the masses enjoyed by the reformists and the left bourgeoisie, the bourgeois measures have been carried out, one after another. The unions have demonstrated their historic uselessness. Instead of putting forward the social demands of the workers, they only discuss the dose, the extent and timing of the losses and sacrifices the working class must accept. Their activity is confined to the same horizon as capitalist political economy. The boss class must, at all costs, restore the profitability of their business, via the continuous devaluation of labour costs and increased productivity in order to become competitive in the context of a globalised economy. In order to overcome these limits and all the impositions these entail, the working class has to go beyond the capitalist horizon and adopt the communist perspective which subjects all social questions to the proletarian point of view, presenting a revolutionary alternative to capitalist society in a productive order free from the laws of the market and profit.

The Conditions Giving Rise to the Generalised Revolt

The globalisation of markets has meant the disappearance of industry which used to produce for the internal market — whose place has been taken by the multinational companies producing immediate and durable consumer goods — and the process of privatisation and transnationalisation of commercial and service enterprise. Very few of these enterprises were competitive and most suffered from serious technological backwardness. The companies which

were unable to integrate into finance capital's game — which forces the entire mechanism of production and distribution to operate as a mere transmission belt for profit — left the scene to the extent that they had to confront the competition from international companies. Although the opening of the capital's market has allowed the inflow of international investment, the buying up of enterprises and financial injections have only provoked a fictitious growth, what is really happening is a transfer of property.

Also, the rural economy, without subsidies, is languishing. The companies which underwent technological reconstruction to remain competitive, dramatically reduced the number of jobs. The enterprises showing positive balance sheets only did so thanks to the practice of downsizing (*via* the cutting back of personnel) but, how long can this state of prosperity for a few firms last, without increasing production and the number of business' on the individual and general level? Last year the economy shrank by almost 7% and this year the attempts at recovery are not producing favourable economic indicators, again these show a fall in sales, production and expectations, as well as a rise in unemployment to 24%. According to DANE, figures most of the unemployed came from commercial activities, (27%), industry (19.2%) and community, social and personal services (24.1%). The number of job losses is presented as follows in the report: Operatives (29.9%), service workers (22.3%), forest workers (1.1%) public functionaries (1.5%) and professionals and technicians (6.9%).

The figures supplied by the investigative bodies show an economy registering its greatest decline in 100 years. According to the Superintendencia de Valores, the firms listed on the stock exchange are worth half of what they were five years ago. From nearly U.S. \$20 000 million, their value reduced to almost U.S. \$10 000 million, i.e. a deterioration of their value by some 51%²

Without the money proceeding from the narcotics trade (now no longer invested in the country but kept hidden or sent to so called "financial paradises" — the amount varying, ac-

according to the differing figures offered by the different state agencies, between \$10 and \$40bn annually), and with interest rates which reached an average of 50% in previous years, enterprises have taken a brutal beating. Entire industries, like construction — which plays an essential, dynamising role throughout the economy — have disappeared and others are suffering recession. Besides, the shock tactics of the government to stop inflation have contributed little to changing the general outlook. Although the application of deflationary measures have permitted the overcoming of the inflationary spiral — by reducing inflation to single figures (9.6%) — as in Ecuador, it has worsened the recession. The deficit in the commercial balance — which in '98 went up to U.S. \$6bn — has been halted, but only because recession has been able to balance the scales. The fall in consumption is also generalised. According to Fedesarrollo, the worsening level of consumption has affected 35.2% of households in the country. Discriminating by social strata, the figures show a particularly serious impact upon the lower sectors of the working class, here affecting 45.1% of households. The statistics of the *Superintendencia de Industria y Comercio*, published for the above quoted period, show plummeting vehicle sales, by 16.9% in 1998 and 53% in 1999. From almost 150 000 cars sold in 1997, this became, hardly two years later, sales around 60 000. A similar fall has been confirmed in the consumption of essential products.

In spite of the government attempting to present to the world an image of internal stability by meeting the payment of its debt to the international financial system, without yet opting for a stoppage or restructuring its external debt like other South American countries, it has to sacrifice 36% of the national budget to cover it whilst reducing social investment to a pathetic 4%. The geometric increase in spending on parasitic sectors due to the hypertrophy of the repressive State mechanisms — strictly linked to the sharpening of the "internal" war — as well as the gigantic growth of external debt, have deprived the State of the capacity which in normal conditions it

would have to intervene to mitigate the dysfunction of the capitalist economy. It is estimated, in fact, that 75% of all new State investment is directed to the repressive apparatus (army, police, judicial system, prisons etc.) and that 68% of state expense arise from the army and police. It is worth noting that new data shows that of the 875 000 directly employed by the government, 325 000 belong to the security forces³. Over the last year and a half, Pastrana's government have carried out 5 tax reforms and is putting forward a sixth which comprises:

- the permanent establishment of a 0.2% tax on every bank transaction, destined to cover the losses of the financial sector.

- directing 50% of the national budget (whose total amount is 87 billion pesos) to the External Debt.

Moreover, with the devaluation of the currency in recent months, and the high cost of issuing bonds abroad (spread) which due to the poor standing of the Colombian economy have gone from an average of 200% to 900%, debt (the total amount is over U.S. \$40 000 000 000) has grown significantly.

All in all, debacle and ruin approach from all sides, seemingly unstoppable. What will finally happen? For the time being, the initiative is in the hands, on the left, of the armed reformists — who put themselves forward as the new agents and local guarantors of imperialism — and on the right, of the

oligarchic bloc currently in power tied to the imperialist capitalism of the USA. Between "left" and "right" is the furious proletariat, without a strategic direction, colossal but headless, rich in potential but, as always, emerged in an ocean of irrationality and misery.

Notes

1 Thanks to devaluation, the current minimum wage is now less than the US \$150 which was the rate at the beginning of 1999. Besides, it would be useful to point out that according to official government statistics (the DANE) in line with the IPC consumer price index, at least 7 minimum salaries are necessary for a nuclear family of three people to subsist in "dignity"

2 See *El Tiempo* 2nd July 2000

3 On this point it is worth observing that when reforms began only 20 years ago, there were 2 000 000 state workers, of which only 120 000 were members of the repressive apparatus. This abundantly demonstrates that the only investment which the bourgeoisie justifies is that which serves its own class defence!

Battaglia Comunista 9 September 2000

Available from the PCInt Address (inside back cover)

Includes articles on

**The Euro
Schools**

Economic Recovery

Terrorism

Shadows over the New Economy

We reproduce here a leaflet given out by Los Angeles Workers' Voice, our sympathising organisation, in response to the increasing attacks of the US ruling class. This leaflet is the latest in a series, including ones on the coming elections and on education in the US. These are available from the address given below.

Rolling Strikes in LA — Workers' Full Share or Bosses' Fair Share?

The mass struggles of LA County workers should be supported. The workers have again stood up and are fighting overwork, lousy pay, deteriorating health care benefits, and no funding for child care. The Demopublican LA County Board of Supervisors have plenty of money for corporate contractors who give them political "campaign contributions" — read bribery! They look the other way on millions in contractor overbillings. They have plenty of funds to pay huge interest payments to big banks. They grant themselves \$15,000 a year pay increases! But now they claim they cannot grant the workers a measly 5%/yr. pay increase for the next 3 years, an 'increase' that will not even keep up with inflation and taxes! They say they will never fund needed child care, etc.

Is getting back \$1.00 for every \$4.50 of the value on average your labor power creates a "Fair Share"? "Fair Share" means what our ruling class say they might be able to afford if it does not cut too deeply into their profit rates. To our bosses, our "Fair Share" is based on the capitalist owners needs to rob and exploit the whole working class. "Fair Share" means settling for the crumbs our masters throw down. It means we get to work harder and get poorer. Should we not fight for a Full

Share since we workers produce all of the wealth of society?

The struggle again proves County Board Democrats Zev Yaroslavsky and Gloria Molina are just as tightfisted and anti-worker as the Republicans like Mike Antonovich! The lie that liberal Democrats are "Friends of Labor" is clearly exposed. The Democrats just held their convention here in LA. Did they give a hoot about the struggles of LA's workers? No, like the Republicans they were busy gathering satchels full of cash from rich corporate donors. They left us with millions in bills to be paid from needed city funds so they could party it up!

The County Supervisors say they must keep expenses under control. What this really means is workers livelihoods must continue to deteriorate so the bosses can get more of our wealth to maximize profits and be competitive. In the jungle laws of capitalist world economy, the rich, with the help of national and state governments, must accumulate profits at a sufficient rate to continue expansion and crush their rivals, at home and abroad. This is what bosses' "Democracy" really looks like!

In this era the unions now all accept the capitalist system of waged slavery. They bargain not on the need to seriously challenge legal robbery by

capitalism, but more or less on the basis of what the ruling class can afford. The workers created ALL the wealth of society. We should not rest until we all have the best health care, childcare, schools, workplaces, healthy environment and actual collective control and planning of the wealth production and distribution in society. Technology and a productive base already exist to create abundance for all. But under capitalist wage slavery, we are told to accept a small fraction of what we deserve. The result is that we work harder and get poorer.

The workers have shown the potential of collective mass action. We can go beyond 'defensive' struggles which only slow down our rulers attacks on our livelihoods. We can spread the struggle to the widest layers of workers. We can choose our own strike committees. We have the power to build for a general strike that will force the powers-that-be to retreat. We could build a real labor movement that inscribes on our banners. "Not a Fair Share of waged slavery for a fair days work, but Abolition of the wages system!" In other words, a struggle for workers' rule with production for human needs and not for sale and profits.

Los Angeles Workers Voice.

Oct. 9, 2000

IBRP sympathisers in North America
Internationalist Notes
(US)

Write for contact and a free copy to:

IN, Box 1531,
Eau Claire,
WI 54702, USA.

Los Angeles Workers
Voice [LAWV]

For contact, write to:

Box 57483,
Los Angeles,
CA 90057, USA.

Internationalist Notes
(Canada)

For contact, write to:

C.P. 266, Succ. C
Montreal, QC, Canada.

We are reproducing below a leaflet, which was distributed in Canada and Italy to an international march, called by feminists to protest against world poverty. This was to take place between the 9th and the 17th of October.

Women's March against Poverty

Only Unity will End Poverty

After centuries of fighting for freedom and equality, what have we got?

- we still earn less than men for the same work - globally we earn 40% less

- Equal Pay legislation has failed. In those countries which introduced legislation - some more than 30 years ago - women still earn 75% of male wages (in the US it's more like 58% if you're not white)

- domestic violence worldwide is getting worse. It is reaching epidemic proportions in countries like Britain. In some poorer states half of all women and girls suffer from domestic violence and 60 million are currently 'missing' - most killed by their own families

- gender apartheid is alive and well in parts of the world like Iran and Afghanistan, where women face segregation and open hostility and discrimination

- rape as a military strategy is also increasing. In wars like those in the former Yugoslavia and Rwanda rape is used by the military against civilians. In the Gulf War the US even used it against their own military personnel

- even in 'peacetime' violence against women is increasing. One woman is raped every 17 minutes in Canada, every 5 minutes in the US. In Canada, 1 woman in 8 will be sexually abused by the time she reaches 18

Far from being the dream of liberation presented by some feminists, the workplace is a living hell for most working class women. Not only are pay and conditions getting worse but sexual abuse is rife. Even in richer countries like Canada, 10% of all women are reporting some kind of abuse in their workplace. The more the capitalist crisis deepens the more it needs to seek out cheap, flexible part-time labour and

women are perfect. It relies as never before on the exploitation of working class women and children, most of whom are sinking deeper and deeper into poverty. Worldwide rural poverty has increased by over 50% since the start of capitalism's present economic crisis in the '70's. Slavery is one of the answers capitalism has found. One million women and children are sold as slaves each year, and more than 30 million women have been sold worldwide, many into the multi-billion dollar sex trade.

For feminists the answer to all this is to have more women in positions of power. Unfortunately they don't mean power by working class women to run society as a whole. They mean individual women 'making it' under capitalism. They ignore the fact this means exploiting other women. They also ignore the fact that some women are doing very nicely under the present social set up. Feminism can't get round the fact that capitalism is based on the violent exploitation of one class by another and it has inequality at its very core. If you're female and belong to the exploited class then the best thing you can hope for is the chance to be exploited on equal terms with men. If you're rich then inequality isn't a problem. It is the working class who pay for this system, especially those who are most disadvantaged, from women and children to the old and immigrants. Capitalism can't end oppression because it thrives on divisions, between men and women, between races, between religions, ages, nations, whatever it can think of, and feminism is just another of the ideologies it uses to do this. Capitalism only exists only to make a profit, and it exploits women and children to the death to get it.

We want working class women to have real power.

Instead of pleading for equal pay with men, we want the overthrow of the wages system. Instead of asking for equality under capitalism, we want its abolition. We want a society of freely associated producers who produce for human need and don't exploit for profit.

We're fighting for communism because it is the only realistic way to fight inequality and the violence and oppression that goes with it.

FIGHT WITH US.

The German Communist Left A Bitter Harvest — The 1923 March Action

In earlier articles in this series (in RP's 6, 8-10 and 16), we have argued that the Left of the workers' movement in Germany after the First World War was placed in a pivotal rôle for the realisation of world proletarian revolution, and possessed some of the understanding which would have made them equal to the tasks they faced. Indeed, this is understating their theoretical achievements, but their failure to provide adequate answers on the question of organisation means that their contribution to our politics is overshadowed by the Italian Communist Left. As we have hopefully demonstrated, the German Left was historically weak on the relation between politics and organisation problem: the current around Luxemburg failed to prepare a split with the *Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands* (SPD), saying that the "worst working class party was better than none at all". When the left did split (by being kicked out!), it formed a new Party with its fellow expellees of the centre. This new Party (*Unabhängige Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands* — USPD) believed that one of the major faults of the SPD was its inability to tolerate within its ranks those who carried out political agitation in opposition to the old Party's politics, whereas the real problem was the anti-working class nature of that old Party. In reaction to the SPD's "flaw" of taking the left seriously, the USPD adopted a federal structure. This allowed the Left, who were still a minority in the new Party, to carry on in the same way as they did in the old Party: making agitation for proletarian politics, despite their membership of a Party with a majority which was anti-proletarian, or, at best, both confused and confusing. That is, the Left were allowed to carry on making the same mistake of giving a

revolutionary gloss to elements which were to sabotage the workers' councils after the November Revolution.

This mistake contributed to the fact that, when the *Kommunistische Partei Deutschlands* (KPD) was founded, it was immediately faced with a situation where the new Party had to hold back Berlin's workers from a confrontation with the state, *without the influence in the class it needed to be able to do this*. In this premature conflict, the so-called Spartacist uprising, Karl Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg lost their lives, along with thousands of others. The proletariat lost forces which it would have need of in future theoretical and physical battles

The USPD split with the SPD foreshadowed the *Kommunistische Arbeiterpartei Deutschlands* (KAPD) split with the KPD in many ways. The left were expelled, and they reacted to this expulsion by complaining at the KPD's interference with their freedom of action. The new Party adopted a federal structure, and contained many elements which were either confused or anti-proletarian (and found itself in the absurd situation of containing Laufenberg and Wolffheim's National Bolsheviks and some of the sharpest critics of nationalism).

However, there were also many differences to the split between the USPD and the SPD. Chief among these is that there is no doubt that the KPD was a proletarian organisation at that point in its history, albeit a seriously compromised one. Even Lenin, whose own politics were, by this time, showing the effects of the Russian Revolution's retreats on various fronts, felt that the KPD needed the KAPD to re-join as a corrective. Whether or not this was political cookery, it was absurd that the German working class, which for so

long had no proletarian Party, was now blessed with two, when the future of the world revolution demanded that the German proletariat worked with the maximum possible unity.

It is true that the KAPD were in no way responsible for the original split, but their attitude to organisation did not facilitate a reunification, let alone the conquest of a united Party by their politics.

The KPD was compromised by the fact that they had acted as pioneers for the idea of the "United Front from above", the collaboration with the leadership of other "workers' Parties" (such as the SPD, which were, in fact, *politically* bourgeois parties with mass working class membership). The "United Front from above" is in serious conflict with the traditional communist attitude to non-communist workers: work with them in practical action which takes them beyond any bourgeois party which they may belong to, and use their *own practice* to expose the leadership of that party. Obviously, one cannot help but sow illusions in the leadership of anti-proletarian parties if one approaches that leadership to initiate action, as in the "United Front from above".

Furthermore, in the Kapp putsch, the KPD had undertaken policies which had seriously weakened the working class (see RP 10).

Nevertheless, these reactionary policies of the KPD were the result of its internal political struggle, and there were plenty of elements who were willing and able to learn from the results of their application. Even the unification of the KPD with the left-wing of the USPD in December 1920 (resulting in the *Vereinigte* — United — KPD, VKPD), although strengthening the right of the KPD, also demonstrated

the pressure towards the left. An eventual reunification of the KAPD and KPD/VKPD could have only helped the resulting Party to come to correct positions on the United Front and on the difficult problem of when and how to encourage class combativity.

One thing is certain: a simple reversal of the KPD/VKPD position of encouraging passivity under (almost) all circumstances to encouraging offensive action in inappropriate circumstances was *not* what was needed. The price of doing this was soon to be made apparent.

The March Action

As a result of a conflict between Levi, the leader of the VKPD, and the Executive Committee of the Comintern over the need to split from those who did not accept the 21 conditions for membership of the Comintern, the right-wing resigned from the leadership of the VKPD after the meeting of the VKPD's central organ in February 1921. Faced with a level of working class consciousness and commitment to the Party which was not in line with the immense objective pressure on the class (and on Russia), Levi's leadership consistently tried to reduce the Party's policy to demanding that the German state form an alliance with Soviet Russia. In contrast to this, the replacement leadership under Brandler, pressurised by the Comintern, began to look for a pretext for action.

This was *not* the position of the VKPD left. The left was well aware that a process of preparation was necessary before any action, and their grievance with the Levi leadership was that it did not take this process seriously. As Ernst Reuter wrote in *Die Rote Fahne*:

We were all of the opinion, up to now, that the German bourgeoisie is not oppressed, that the German bourgeoisie enjoys life, and that it counts on the fraternal support of the Entente imperialists while oppressing the German proletariat...; it is exactly for this reason that we have made it our task to fight against every nationalist slogan. Let me remind you that the Communist party neither approved of the Versailles treaty,

nor opposed it, but demanded the revolutionary solution of the world crisis...

For the time being, the German proletariat must first solve its mission in Germany. Hic Rhodus, hic salta!... Let the German proletariat first break the resistance of this [bourgeois] society; let the German proletariat first secure possession of all factories and [other] enterprises; then we shall see how this struggle for liberation waged by the German workers will affect the proletariat of England, France,... of the western countries.... We do not want contrived measures designed to convince either the German workers or the Executive [of the Comintern] how active we are. We want to show the German working masses the clear, unequivocal, though difficult road to the German revolution.

No. 71, 12th February 1921, quoted in *Stillborn Revolution*, WT Angress. Emphasis in the original is in italics, our emphasis in bold.

And this critique still held for the Brandler leadership.

But this leadership preferred to let its imagination do the preparatory work by itself, and invented the "theory of the revolutionary offensive", of which Lenin, according to Clara Zetkin, said:

Is it a theory anyway? Not at all, it is an illusion... sheer romanticism. That is why it was manufactured in the 'land of poets and thinkers,' with the help of my dear Bela [Kun], who also belongs to a poetically gifted nation and feels himself obliged to be always more left than the left.

Reminiscences of Lenin, also quoted in *Stillborn Revolution*.

At the same time as the VKPD was looking for an excuse for action, the German bourgeoisie was looking for an excuse to provoke such an action before conditions were ripe, so that it could crush it and thus avoid its ripening.

The bourgeoisie were convinced that the workers in central Germany, and, in particular, Prussian Saxony, were still clandestinely armed with weapons ob-

tained in the upheavals of the Kapp putsch, and before. And there was nothing clandestine about the workers' industrial militancy and their willingness to fight back against the police without the mass use of arms. Moreover, even if the electoral participation of the VKPD was a mistaken tactic, it nevertheless revealed a rapidly growing support for that Party in the region (of course, there were many who would support the VKPD as a parliamentary party, but not as an extra-parliamentary one, and, possibly, vice-versa, but the bourgeoisie and their police forces could not be expected to make this fine distinction).

The police found what they were looking for when an attempt to destroy the *Siegessäule* (Victory Column, a prominent landmark in Berlin's imperialist scenery) was made on 13th March. It is unclear who placed the dynamite (which failed to explode) at the foot of the column, but it was almost certainly not an official action of the VKPD (the police later arrested 11, some of whom were members of the KAPD, but the structure of the KAPD meant that it is difficult to say whether this Party could have "official" actions, even if the police caught the actual perpetrators).

The discovery of the dynamite set off a chain of meetings between police chiefs and other parts of the state with the aim of occupying parts of Saxony with a large force. On 16th March, Hörsing, the *Oberpräsident* of Prussian Saxony, issued a proclamation to the inhabitants of his region in which he attempted to criminalise the militant workers and asked for support for the force which he was about to despatch against these criminals.

The VKPD *Zentrale* was in session when the Hörsing proclamation was issued, and their decision was to call for a general strike on 29th March, after the Easter holiday (so that the holidays would not break the strike's momentum). But the logic of the "revolutionary offensive" "theory" immediately began to overthrow this idea of a defensive action: if the VKPD was to go on the offensive, allowing the police until after Easter to get a grip on the occupied region would be a decisive mistake.

Hörsing's police occupied the Eisleben-Mansfeld and Merseberg areas on 19th March. The first thing the VKPD did was to bring forward their call for a general strike, and they continued to agitate for this until 22nd, when the call for more decisive action was taken up. Ironically, the most successful in creating an armed fight-back against the police was Max Hoelz, who was at this time unconnected with the VKPD. Rather, he was a sympathiser of the KAPD (he gave part of the funds he captured to this Party). He was the focus for the creation of workers' militias in the Mansfeld area, and these were to play a key rôle in the unfolding drama. Elsewhere, the Leuna chemical works was taken over by its workforce of 18 000, who left it in the control of a garrison of 2000 armed workers. The general strike continued to slowly spread in Central Germany, and there were some echoes in the rest of the country, notably in Hamburg, where workers took over shipyards, and the Rhineland, where there were strikes¹. But, apart from these exceptions, in the rest of Germany, the response was lukewarm. The state declared a "non-military" state of emergency in Hamburg and Saxony, and sent (presumably, non-military) army units to back up the police around Halle in Saxony. The insurrection, which had never been co-ordinated, began to fall apart. Hoelz's militias were ambushed on their way to launch a "surprise" attack on Halle, and they were defeated in an armed battle on March 29th. Hoelz escaped, but he and his remaining forces were beaten in the final battle of the insurrection on April 1st. The workers of the Leuna remained isolated from the other battles being fought, and the works was captured along with the majority of its defenders after an artillery bombardment on March 29th. On the same day, riots in Hamburg were quelled.

The Aftermath

As is natural when the bourgeoisie defeats workers in the field, many atrocities were committed. As for the "legal" war on working class insurgents, the majority of the 4000 convicted by special courts stayed in prison until July 1922, when there

was an amnesty. Of the leaders of the insurrection, only Hoelz and Brandler were sentenced.

Initially, the EC of the Comintern congratulated the VKPD for their conduct during the action, and was very far from supporting the condemnation of the Brandler leadership by Levi. The latter made some telling points about the need to obtain mass support before any bid for power: he quoted Lenin:

The most important thing is the ideological conquest of the vanguard. Without it even the first step toward victory becomes impossible. Yet from there to the final victory is still quite a distance. One cannot win with only the vanguard. To engage the vanguard in a decisive struggle before the entire class... and the broad masses have taken a position by which they can either support the vanguard directly, or at least express their benevolent neutrality... would not be merely folly, but a crime as well.

Quoted in Angress

(although the "devil may quote scripture": Levi's prescription for mass support for communism was... the sacrifice of communism). When his views were rejected by the VKPD *Zentrale*, Levi broke Party discipline and published them. Naturally, he was expelled.

To the disappointment of the KPD *Zentrale*, the whole question of the March Action was reconsidered by the Comintern EC. And to the disappointment of the Left, the criticism of the VKPD's conduct in the Action provided a hook for the "To the Masses" policy launched by the Comintern EC — the idea that Communist Parties had to avoid politics which might alienate reformist workers.

The KAPD, as might be expected, had many opinions on the March Action. Görter's critique seems to be the best:

The VKPD has, through parliamentary activity — which in the conditions of bankrupt capitalism has no other meaning than the mystification of the masses — diverted the proletariat from revolutionary action. It has gathered up hundreds of thousands of

non-communists and become a "mass party". The VKPD has supported the trade unions by the tactic of creating cells within them... When the German revolution, having become more and more powerless, began to retreat, when the best elements of the VKPD became more and more dissatisfied and began calling for action, suddenly the VKPD decided on a grand enterprise for the conquest of political power. This is what it consisted of: before the provocation by Hörsing and the SiPo [Sicherheitspolizei — security police], the VKPD decided on an artificial action from above, without the spontaneous impulse of the broad masses: in other words it adopted the tactics of the putsch. The Executive Committee [of the Comintern] and its representatives in Germany had for a long time been insisting that the party should strike out and show that it was a true revolutionary party. As if the essential aspect of a revolutionary tactic consisted simply of striking with all one's forces! On the contrary, when instead of affirming the revolutionary strength of the proletariat, a party undermines this same strength and weakens the proletariat by supporting parliament and the trade unions, and then after such preparations suddenly resolves to hit out by launching a great offensive action in favour of the same proletariat it has just been weakening, this can be nothing other than a putsch. That is to say, action decreed from above, having no source in the masses themselves, and thus doomed to failure from the start. And this attempt at a putsch has nothing revolutionary about it: it is opportunist in exactly the same way as parliamentarism or the tactic of union cells. Yes, this tactic is the inevitable other side of the coin of parliamentarism and the tactic of union cells, of collecting up non-communist elements, of the policy of leaders substituting for the policy of the masses, or, more precisely, the policy of the class. This weak and intrinsically

corrupt tactic must inevitably lead to putsches.

Görter, *Lessons of the March Action*, Afterword to the *Open Letter to Comrade Lenin*, *Der Proletarier*, May 1921 (quoted in the International Communist Current's *International Review* 93).

Apart from the seed of the idea that the Party is dispensable in the development of class consciousness, which is implicit in the criticism "the policy of leaders substituting for the policy of the masses, or, more precisely, the policy of the class", we would agree that the *putschism* of the March Action was the obverse of the coin of the United Front policies, in that neither tactic aims at an understanding by the proletariat that it should run society in its own class interest.

However, that Görter's view of the Action was not the only one current in the KAPD is demonstrated by Kool's assertion that it was

...first conscious offensive by the revolutionary German proletarians against bourgeois state power.

Die Linke gegen die Parteiherrschaft (The Left against Party Domination, also quoted in IR93).

Conclusion: Two False Conceptions of the Party

The March Action was necessarily a failure, because the VKPD did not make a sober assessment of the level of support the Action needed to be successful, nor of the actual level of support it could gather.

The VKPD saw itself as a kind of chief of staff of the proletarian movement, able to turn proletarian struggle on and off as if at the click of a switch. If the tactic of the United Front "from above" brought the Party growth in members and influence to the point where it (or a Max Hoelz) could successfully heighten the struggle, surely that heightened struggle would also bring further workers into the struggle? This might have been true if these further workers had merely lacked confidence, but what they lacked was *conscious-*

ness of the need to struggle for their own power. An effective revolutionary Party uses the material situation of the working class to spread this consciousness in the class. Without a revolutionary Party concretely defending and propagating the idea that the working class can and must take power to defend its material interest, such an idea can never reach the point where it becomes a material force.

Once this point is reached, the Party's rôle is just beginning: it must warn the working class against both premature attempts to seize power and when the time to strike is passing, without imagining for one moment that it plays the same rôle *vis-à-vis* the class that a Commander-in-Chief plays *vis-à-vis* an army. At all times it must attempt to persuade the class of the correctness of its positions, and this is primarily a political task.

But the need of the Party to persuade the class to act in unison does not mean that the Party should adopt the KAPD federal structure. On the contrary, such a structure prevents the carrying out of this task, which instead requires the strongest political centralisation².

In 1923, the revolutionary wave was in need of revival. If the March Action had not been "conjured up", there is no guarantee that this revival would have occurred, but the action wasted a large part of the German proletariat's remaining reserves.

In the future, there is no doubt that there will be further revolutionary waves (as the proletariat will be attacked by capitalism for as long as capitalism exists), but the culmination of such a wave in victory depends on learning the lessons of the past, one of the most vital of which is the need for a politically centralised Party of the programme of proletarian power. The creation of such a Party is the aim of the International Bureau for the Revolutionary Party.

EDL

Notes

¹ The number of workers involved in strikes at the peak of the action has been put at 200 000 throughout Germany (by VKPD union function-

ary Malzahn, quoted in Angress). The number of fighters in the militias is widely disputed, but there was an absolute minimum of 4000, the number who found themselves in custody after the crushing of the insurrection. If even only the same number escaped (or were killed in the fighting — or afterwards), that makes 8000.

² The particular concrete situation in which the Party works may demand organisational decentralisation, but this is another question, and, anyway, the greater the political centralisation, the more organisational decentralisation can be permitted, as then isolated groups of Party members are more likely to make correct political decisions.

Trivial Pursuit

A Review of *Karl Marx* by Francis Wheen

Fourth Estate £8.99 paperback ISBN 1 84115 114 9

Shortlisted for numerous literary awards and generally lionised in the bourgeois press for making "Marx's humanity" shine through, the publication of Wheen's biography in paperback gives us the opportunity to see if all the praise is justified. The brutal truth is that it is not. The best bit of the book is the last page. Appropriately it is not Wheen's words we read but those of the American journalist John Swinton. He met the ailing Marx in Ramsgate in 1880 and described his meeting in the *New York Sun*:

The talk was of the world, and of man, and of time, and of ideas, as our glasses tinkled over the sea. The railway train waits for no man, and night is at hand. Over the thought of the babblement and rack of the age and ages, over the talk of the day and the scenes of the evening, arose in my mind one question touching upon the final law of being for which I would seek answer from this sage. Going down to the depths of language and rising to the heights of emphasis, during an interspace of silence, I interrupted the revolutionist and philosopher in these fateful words: "What is?" And it seemed as though his mind was inverted for a moment while he looked upon the roaring sea in front and the restless multitude upon the beach. "What is?" I had inquired, to which in deep and solemn tone, he replied: "Struggle!" At first it seemed as though I had heard the echo of despair; but peradventure it was the law of life.

What Swinton had heard was the law of history. Marx and Engels' discovery of the class struggle as the motive force of history was their greatest single contribution to the working class. It underpinned everything else they wrote. Wheen's quotation though is out of character with the rest of his book. He has managed to write a whole

life of Marx systematically playing down the impact of the working class on his thinking and his thinking upon the working class. The Communist League become simply a set of squabbling exiled Germans only united in seeking out vendettas against each other. The Chartists were too English to be of much interest to Marx and Engels, whilst the First International was really just some kind of philatelic society (attracting only obscure trades union bodies like the Cordwainers of Darlington) which wasted Marx's time and drained him of energy. The fact that he could only sustain his vision of a communist society through the actions of flesh and blood human beings does not enter Wheen's head. This perhaps explains why he leaves out of his account of the *Communist Manifesto* its most famous basic statement of historical materialism (as Plekhanov later baptised it)

The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggle.

Freeman and slave, patrician and plebeian, lord and serf, guildmaster and journeyman, in a word oppressor and oppressed, stood in constant opposition to one another, carried on an uninterrupted, now hidden, now open fight, a fight that each time ended, either in a revolutionary reconstitution of society or the common ruin of the contending classes.

Instead of the class struggle throughout history Wheen focuses only on what Marx said in the *Manifesto* about the revolutionary role of the bourgeoisie in his own time. That Marx did not see bourgeois rule as the end of history is omitted (or rather explained away as "slightly quaint or outdated"). It is now fashionable to see Marx, not as the critic of capitalism but its most perceptive analyst. No wonder Wheen, in explaining why he has written about Marx, quotes a 1997 edition of *The New*

Yorker where Wall St bankers proclaim Marx as "the next big thinker". This book can only be published by a bourgeoisie which already thinks that the working class is beaten for all time.

The whole idea of biography is a bourgeois form of history. Individuals atomically pursuing their own interests are the stuff of the bourgeois world but for them the real history makers are its great men. The biography of Marx, who was undeniably one of the greatest thinkers of his or any age, proves otherwise. Wheen sneers at Marx's "disciples" (without ever naming any) for treating the *Communist Manifesto* as a timeless text. Without descending to the level of those Bordigists who insist that Marxism has remained "invariant" since 1848 there are some "timeless" statements in the *Manifesto*. These are all concerned with the worldview of the working class which, as the last great exploited class in history carries with it the possibility of total human emancipation. Marx and Engels could only create their vision of a new society because they could see the reality of the society in which they lived. They also acknowledged over the succeeding years the advances made by the working class meant that in certain programmatic aspects the *Manifesto* had become outdated (e.g. over the need to smash the bourgeois state following the Paris Commune) but Wheen doesn't tell the reader this. Perhaps this is because some of his social democratic "Marxist" friends like the SWP's Paul Foot do still repeat its programme as if it were gospel. In the second place Wheen cannot enter into a discussion about how Marxism developed under Marx since that would mean showing that Marx was part of a real living working class movement.

That is why he cannot acknowledge the most "timeless" part in the whole *Manifesto*, which is the statement that it is class struggle not individuals that

ultimately make history. This does not mean that individual actions do not have a bearing on the course of history but they do so only in a certain economic and social framework. Or as Marx put it in another of his famous works

Men make history but not in circumstances of their own choosing

The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Napoleon

Marx's achievements in the field of history, economics, social science, or what you will, are inconceivable outside of the rise of the proletariat. But Wheen never makes this link. His aim he tells us is to rescue Marx from both the disciples and the dons. Not for him the difficult task of textual exegesis or understanding what Marx was really about. He wants to show us only that Marx was "a human being". If ever there was a clearer statement of pre-determined banality then we would like to see it. If that is all he was then there is no need to write about him. At least previous biographers like David McLellan had a more serious purpose. McLellan's biography appropriately entitled *Karl Marx: His Life and Thought* appeared in 1973. McLellan, although no Marxist gives Marx's ideas serious treatment (even if he too has a tendency to see them as independent of the "real movement" of the growth of the working class). He justified writing his biography by pointing out that since Franz Mehring's full-scale biography of 1918 the Marx-Engels correspondence as well as early texts like the *Grundrisse* had been published (McLellan was too modest to state his own contribution to these studies).

Wheen has a problem here. How does he solve the need to acknowledge McLellan without actually saying that he intends to do a more trivial version. His answer is to make use of the more racy bits of McLellan, dressing them up in a literary style which consciously strives to be clever, and then he throws in three criticisms of McLellan's "inaccuracy" on minor points so that the new reader, unacquainted with the earlier work will think that it is really rather poor. This is the stuff of modern bourgeois writing.

However that is only the beginning. Wheen, having left out the revolutionary essence of the *Communist*

There are warnings about this earlier in the book. Literary references abound everywhere. From his earliest pages Wheen stands in admiration of Marx's knowledge of European literature in general, and Shakespeare in particular. It is an admiration which he cannot conceal since he often, when not using public school-type euphemisms (when he tells us Marx gets "squiffy" he presumably means "pissed"), copies the precise words used in Marx's letters. He gradually develops the theme that Marx's writings should be understood, not as science but only as literature. He compares the *Grundrisse*'s style to the Ulysses of

Homer (and Tennyson) and when he talks about Marx's long years preparing the notes for *Capital* he likens him to the dry pedant Casaubon in George Eliot's *Middlemarch* seeking the "Key to All Mythologies". This prepares us for the idea that *Capital* should be understood not as an analysis of the real world but as a picaresque novel.

Wheen actually begins the discussion of *Capital* in promising fashion by dealing with its critics. But even here he is not original. In a passage remarkably reminiscent of (amongst others) Michael Harrington's 1976 work *The Twilight of Capitalism* he deals with the most famous anti-Marx



Karl Marx

Karl Marx's ideas can only be understood as part of a real movement

Manifesto (which gets a discussion of less than five pages in a four hundred page book) gives *Capital* an even grosser treatment.

texts. Popper's fatuous criticism that Marx's ideas cannot be scientific because they are not open to verification by the normal rules of proof and disproof is dealt with by the observation

that after more than a century there is adequate material around to show whether what Marx' says about capitalism is true or not. Similarly he demolishes the criticism of the economist Paul Samuelson that empirical reality had falsified Marx's assertion that capitalist development would lead to greater immiseration of the workers. Wheen, like Harrington, points out that Marx had only stated that under capitalism there would a relative decline in wages as the working class produced a greater amount of surplus value for which they would receive no reward. As Marx wrote

It follows therefore that in proportion as capital accumulates, the situation of the worker, be his payment high or low, must grow worse.

But if Wheen really had been clarifying Marx's economic thought he could have argued that Marx saw capitalism as a single, global system and that alongside the relative immiseration of the entire proletariat stands the absolute immiseration of all those working in the sweatshops of global capitalism. But this is only a minor quibble given what Wheen says next. No sooner has he attacked Popper and Samuelson than he is saying that Marx's conception of poverty is like Christ's a moral one. If that is bad enough worse is to follow. He next tells us that *Capital* can best be understood, not as a work of difficult economics but

as a work of the imagination: a Victorian melodrama, or a vast Gothic novel ... or perhaps a satirical utopia like Swift's land of the Houyhnhnms ... a picaresque odyssey.

which also owes inspiration to Laurence Sterne's *Tristram Shandy*. Even this isn't an original line as 40 years ago Edmund Wilson compared Marx to Swift as a writer of irony in his *To the Finland Station*. This Wheen himself admits but then claims to go further. He supports his allegations about *Capital* being an imaginative work by making much play on Marx's formula "appears as" but the words have an entirely different sense. They are a statement of Marx's scientific method.

If things and their essence appear as the same thing then what need for science.

In the 1873 introduction to Capital Marx underlines that his work has literary shortcomings later averring that

There is no royal road to science.

Transforming science into literature is just another demonstration of the trivialisation of his subject which Wheen indulges in from the beginning. Despite the fact that Wheen is quite good at demolishing Marx's enemies the whole book is designed to divorce Marx from his revolutionary activity. There is no mention, for example, of the fact that both Marx and Engels should agree to provide a new preface to the *Communist Manifesto* to take account of the main lesson of the Paris Commune. This was that the proletariat could not simply lay hold of the ready-made state machinery but had to smash it before organising their own unique revolutionary form of political and social power. We could give others but the point is made. What Wheen gives us is a Marx divorced from the working class. Shorn of this he can be reduced to an entertaining but eccentric old guest who is absolutely safe to invite to dinner with *Guardian*, public schoolboy journalists. The bourgeoisie will not be so generous with him

once the working class starts to give new life to the social ideas he fought for all his life.

J.

**Internationalist
Communist 19**
**Review of the International
Bureau for the Revolutionary Party**

Out Soon!

Marx and Capitalist Development

The bourgeoisie is forever telling us that history has proved that communism doesn't work, and that it is dead and buried. By this, of course, they mean "State Capitalism" as existed in Russia. It is, however, curious that, although they claim that communism is dead, they still think it is necessary to try and disprove Marx's analysis of capitalist society and his predictions of its tendencies. One of the things the bourgeoisie try to deny is that society is divided into classes, since we are all "empowered consumers" now. Another is that the working class is growing increasingly impoverished relative to the bourgeoisie. We reproduce below an article published by our sister organisation in their paper *Battaglia Comunista* in Italy.

The Last Metropolitan Myth: "The poor capitalist workers"

According to some statistics, a good 76 million Americans, 43% of families possess shares or participate in shared investment funds. In only six years, between 1989 and 1995 the number of share holding workers grew by a good 32%, this tendency would lead to almost all wage workers would be share holders within a decade. For bourgeois economists, who could be charged with everything, but certainly not of the inability to fantasise, we have therefore entered a new era; that of the Capitalist Worker. Society's class division, the exploitation of labour by capital and the class struggle this generates, can with good reason be considered fossilised remnants of a long distant past. The future is to be found in that data which represents a society in which the contradiction between Capital and Labour has been definitively superseded by the suppleness and progressive power of finance capital which in the form of shares would favour a greater

"democratisation" of the economy. In the last ten years the number of U.S. workers owning shares has in fact increased; but is this data enough to prove that we are in the presence of a new and more favourable distribution of wealth?

Firstly it is necessary to point out that, in reality, the American workers, like those everywhere, because of the dismantling of public pension schemes, and threatened with the loss of their job, are constrained to direct their pension contributions to the shared investment funds of the enterprise they belong to, who in turn make gigantic profits out of financial speculation, whilst not a crumb ends up in the workers' pockets.

"Between 1983 and 1988 — writes the U.S. economist C. Collins — the price of shares went up 13 times, so that \$100 invested on the stock market in 1983 would now be worth \$1 300. Good sense tells us that everyone benefits from an expanding market. After all, today nearly half the population owns shares, a higher percentage than ten years ago" (C. Collins — *The ever richer economy* — *Surplus* No. 6). However, it is not so. The real average U.S. wages, despite the increases obtained in 1988, are still inferior to those of 1973 and the average American family, in order to compensate for loss of salary has greatly increased its indebtedness, so much so that by now, the repayment of debt, — still according to Collins — "devours 17% of consumers' income...leading to one family in five having a net negative income..."

The fact that a growing number of workers own shares, therefore, means absolutely nothing in itself, because in the majority of cases this involves payments for pensions managed by shared funds. The transformation of parts of salary directly or indirectly into shares does not change workers into capitalists; but ultimately favours the

capitalists who after having exploited them take part of their salary thus making them virtual salaries deferred in time with no certain value given that the quotes for shared funds are subject to frequent oscillations.

Once the quota corresponding to pension contributions is subtracted, the quantity of shares and bonds owned by workers is really negligible. Once again Collins writes "In 1995, the latest year for which precise data is available, almost three quarters of the owners of shares held a value of less than \$5 000, including their holdings in pension funds...financial instruments like stocks and shares remain concentrated in the hands of a relatively limited number of people, with the richest 10% of population owning 88% of shares and 90% of state bonds...Even amongst the most fortunate 10%, wealth is highly concentrated. Scarcely 1% of families, each one with at least \$2.4 million of net wealth (wealth minus debt), now possess 40% of national wealth, double the percentage declared twenty years ago" If one excludes from the calculation fixed forms of wealth, then 42% of financial wealth in the U.S.A is possessed by half of that 1%, that is of 225 thousand families. "Thanks to the combination, continues Collins — of growing profits, high rates of real interest, the astronomic salaries of directors, and a stock market in full boom, the wealth after inflation of the richest 1% of the population has increased by 17% between 1983 and 1995. For others, the boom has been a disaster. Thanks to falling salaries, the low levels of initial savings and the rapid rise of personal debt, the poorest 40% of families have lost a distressing 80% of their own net wealth." While the personal patrimony of Bill Gates alone "is more than the sum income of 40% of the American population".

On the world scale, the phenomenon is even more obvious. Data from UNDP (the United Nations Human Development Programme), out last June, fully confirm the tendency towards the concentration of wealth in fewer hands. "The difference between the income of the developed countries and that of the poor countries — writes Stefania Di Llellis in her comments on the report just quoted, — has grown exponentially in the last century and half: the ratio was 3:1 in 1820, 35:1 in 1950, 44:1 in '73, to 72:1 in '92" (*La Repubblica*, 30/6/2000). Therefore in 1999, whilst the wealth of the world's richest 200 people came to a thousand billion dollars, the income of the poorest 582 million people who live in the poorest 43 countries in the world hardly came to 146 billion dollars. As a consequence around 30 000 children die from otherwise curable diseases and malnutrition every hour; 100 million children live by begging and in the U.S.A as well, one

person in five is condemned to illiteracy. Nor could this be otherwise given the powerful tendency gearing the economy towards finance. The growth of the parasitic appropriation of surplus value, through financial income, necessarily implies a profound modification in the processes of wealth distribution; in fact financial investment only in extremely reduced measure becomes wages and salaries whilst it allows the realisation of very high super profits. If one adds to that the fact that to secure the growth of the financial sphere, everywhere the pensions, health and social security systems are being dismantled, one can easily explain that the prevalent tendency in the processes of wealth distribution are towards its most exasperated polarisation, with the consequent polarisation of growing strata of society. Here we have exact confirmation of what Marxist criticism of capitalist economy had largely forecast, precisely that critique

which bourgeois ideologists would love to be rid of at all cost and we know that when reality can no longer be denied, there is always someone ready to swear that ghosts, or capitalist workers really exist.

Revolutionary Perspectives Back Issues

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Back issues are available £2 (plus 50p postage in UK or £1 elsewhere) from the group address.

We reproduce below an article published by Battaglia Comunista the Italian section of the IBRP in their paper Battaglia Comunista No. 7/8 after the OPEC summit in Vienna in June. Since this article was published there has been another summit in Caracas Venezuela which saw further modest increases in production following US pressure on its OPEC clients, particularly Saudi

Arabia. When this did not bring the price down sufficiently the US released 30 million barrels from its strategic reserve. This caused the price to stabilise at around \$30 per barrel. These actions have been taken by the US to prevent prices rising too high in an election year.

The OPEC Summit — Imperialist Clashes on the Terrain of Petroleum.

The OPEC summit in Vienna, which was meant to calm the price of petroleum, did not achieve the result hoped for by the majority of industrialised countries. Behind the scenes, manoeuvring against European and Japanese interests, was the United States, whose interests lie in keeping the price of oil sufficiently high to set back its rivals ensure that the \$ remains the principal world currency and the exclusive currency for oil.

The modest increase of 708 000 barrels per day decided on 23rd of June, from the current 24.6 million to 25.4 million, almost a 3% increase, should have brought the price to \$25 per barrel, considering the balance point both for the producing and consuming countries. However, after early oscillations, the price is firmly established beyond \$30 per barrel.

Contrary to public perception, which is influenced by the sky-high price of petrol on the old continent, and the doubling of the price of fuel over the last year in the USA, the value of black gold has diminished notably over recent decades.

Expressed in 1973 dollars, the real average price of Opec petroleum has therefore fallen from \$9.82 per barrel in 1974 to \$5.61 in 1997 and to \$4.82 in 1999. According to the latest IMF statistics, on the basis of 1999 being 100, the average price of petroleum fell to 83.8 in 1997, whilst

the world index of primary material prices rose to 112.92

(Le monde diplomatique / il manifesto, June 2000)

Over the same period the value of world exports grew almost seven times, whilst the value of petroleum exports on the world level only doubled, going from 19.6% of world exports in 1974 to almost 5% in 1999, while Opec which represented 14.4% in 1974 fell to 2.95% in 1997. The present soaring prices of petrol depend, therefore, not so much on the exporting countries, but on the speculative manoeuvres of the cartels of western petrol companies.

Considering the current rhythm of growth in the international economy and despite the fact that the industrialised countries have reduced their energy consumption significantly through new technology, petroleum will remain the most important raw material. Not only as a source of energy but especially because its derivatives are used in the majority of products.

This universal characteristic of petroleum naturally makes it a fundamental and privileged weapon over which the most powerful imperialist power can in no way renounce its control, in the same way as those who aspire to challenge this domination cannot renounce it. Hence the sometimes hidden, sometimes obvious tension between the USA and Europe. Big European capital aims to strengthen the European Union and make the Euro compete with the dollar. If this is to occur the EU cannot abandon its efforts to take the petroleum monopoly from the Ameri-

cans, or at least to achieve its own areas of control.

This prospect is made more difficult by the fact that the United States has petroleum, whilst Europe is substantially lacking and dependent on imports:

Contrary to the countries of Western Europe and Japan, the United States can count on abundant energy resources which allow it, in the long term and when necessary, to satisfy its own needs. What is more, they occupy a privileged position on the global energy scene which would allow them, in case of crisis, to provide for themselves much more easily than all the others

(Le monde diplomatique/il manifesto, cit.).

Therefore of key strategic importance as regards the sharpening of inter-imperialist tensions, which can only manifest themselves with ever-greater force with the increment in capitalist contradictions, it is obvious that the Europeans will have to try to leave this damaging situation. For their part the USA, for the same motive, will try to reinforce their supremacy in all petroleum bearing areas of the world, even with armed force, as they have always done, whilst they are thinking of building up their internal reserves again, thus turning around a very negative tendency. From the collapse in prices of 1985-86 to today, the petroleum reserves of the United States have decreased by 40% whilst production has decreased by 31.2%, increasing their dependence on imported crude oil from 33.2% to 50.9%. Hence American

Slavery and Child Wage Labour within Capitalism

Today at the beginning of the 21st century 250,000,000 children are involved in child wage labour and there still exist over 25,000,000 slaves

According to official statistics, of those 250,000,000 involved in child labour: 61% are to be found in Asia, 32% in Africa and 7% in Latin America. Child labour does of course exist in every country in one form or another. A MORI poll conducted for the TUC shows that one in three 12 year olds and one in five 11 year olds are employed illegally in Britain. It is, however, countries within the periphery that have the greatest amount of children involved in wage labour. These children work in both agriculture and industry.

71% of those involved in child labour work as agricultural labourers. The rest can be found, predominantly in factories/sweatshops. The rate of exploitation for these children is higher than for adults. As well as being cheaper to employ than adult labourers they are more docile. The tasks these children perform are often suited to their size. They are used to do very small stitching and weaving. The 7,000 children who work in the Sialkot district in Pakistan produce 70% of the world's footballs. Children are also used to make clothes and foot-ware, which are then sold on to the children

of the west. The repetitive work, long hours and poor conditions that these children work in often cause growth irregularities and limb deformations.

The UN Secretary General Kofi Annan highlights the destructive nature of child labour: "Child labour has serious consequences that stay with the individual and with society for far longer than the years of childhood. Young workers not only face dangerous working conditions. They face long term physical, intellectual, and emotional stress. They face an adulthood of unemployment and illiteracy." The UN Secretary General is in good company in his critical accounts of child labour, in 1845 Engels had this to say about it: "The great mortality among the children of the working-class, especially among those of the factory operatives, is proof enough of the unwholesome conditions under which they pass their first years....At nine years of age a child is sent into the mill to work 6.5 hours daily, until the thirteenth year; then twelve hours until the eighteenth year. The old enfeebling influences continue, while the work is added to them.....in no case can a child's presence in the damp, heavy air of the factory, often at once warm and wet, contribute to good health; and, in any case, it is unpardonable to sacrifice to the greed of an unfeeling bourgeoisie the time of children which should be devoted solely to their physical and

mental development, withdraw from school and the fresh air, in order to wear them out for the benefit of the manufacturers." (F. Engels "The condition of the Working Class in England." 1845.

International law is supposed to protect children's right to childhood. Article 32 of the UN convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) states that: "State Parties recognise the right of the child to be protected from performing any work that is likely to be hazardous or to interfere with the child's education or to be harmful to the child's health or physical, mental, spiritual, moral development." Since 1989 child labour has increased by 14%. In March last year a new law was passed to stop child labour (worst form of child labour convention No. 182). This law officially comes into force on 19th November. Of the 175 International Labour organisation (ILO) members, to date only 37 countries have said that they will ratify it. Such laws will never be enforced since, firstly, none of the countries with large amounts of children forced into wage labour will ratify them, and secondly the metropolitan bourgeoisie want child labour to continue.

There are now more children working in capitalism's factories than ever before in history! Although it is now over one and a half centuries since the bourgeoisie of the metropolitan countries outlawed child labour in their own coun-

The OPEC Summit

Continued from previous page

interest is to maintain price levels high enough to motivate production with new investment and prospecting.

In this vein one can explain their desire to mothball, via sanctions, at least until the right moment, the producing

countries like Iran, Iraq and Libya. The theatre of inter-imperialist war finds in petroleum a very dangerous potential detonator. The USA, Europe and Japan are the main contenders, without forgetting the former great imperialist

plunderer. The conflict in Chechnya demonstrates that also Russia does not want to remain an observer.

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tries, today they are exploiting children in the peripheral countries with a vengeance. Why is this? All the laws moral hand wringing of the bourgeoisie are simply cynical camouflage to conceal the brutal and rapacious exploitation of these children. They give the illusion that something is being done and this aberration will soon disappear. This is not the case. The real reason this is occurring is to be found in capitalism's crisis of profitability. It is in order to increase profits that capital scours the world for children to exploit. For many companies in the developed countries, particularly clothing, footwear and sports manufacturers, the surplus labour taken from children is a vital element in their profitability.

Slavery

A further result of capitalism's crisis of profitability, though an indirect one, is the massive increase in slavery which has occurred in the peripheral countries in the last two decades. Every concrete social formation is always a specific combination of different modes of production. Those in existence today are no exception. The most dominant mode of production, at present, is of course wage-labour. As well as wage labour, other modes exist in various forms. The harshest of these is slavery. A slave receives nothing in return for their labour. They are entirely alienated from what they produce. Some slaves are bought and sold (chattel slaves). Slavery is of course also illegal under International Bourgeois law: "No one shall be held in slavery or servitude; slavery and the slave trade shall be prohibited in all their forms" (Article 4 of the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights). However the Bourgeoisie are not as keen at policing themselves, as they are at policing the proletariat. After drugs and guns the traffic in humans is the third largest source of surplus value for organised crime.

Sex slaves are the most common types. The Philippines has become the largest migrant nation with 5.5 million working abroad. Large numbers of these end up working in the sex trade. Many of the victims are barely in their

teens. The slaves are kept in brothels and receive no pay. They are given food and clothes. Brothel owners like girls from different countries of origin, because if no common language is shared the slaves are less likely to plan an escape or complain together about conditions. Japanese yakuza groups trade Filipino women and children into brothels in Australia and Japan. Nearly 250,000 women and children from south-east Asia are bought and sold in this way each year. They fetch between \$6,000 and \$10,000 each. The states of the former Soviet Union account for 150,000-200,000 more, according to Anita Botti, principal deputy director of the United States inter-agency council on women. She believes the going rate for European women is \$15,000-\$30,000. Up to 50,000 of them enter the United States each year. The global turnover of the industry is estimated at \$6 billion a year.

During the Classical Epoch slavery was the dominant mode of production. Then slaves were traditionally captured during military conquests. In the Classical Epoch military power was more closely linked to economic growth than in any other Epoch. This is because war provided fresh slave labour and slave labour allowed the citizenry the time to practice military manoeuvres and allowed them to go off to war. The classical Epoch was massively rural in its basic quantitative proportions. Therefore, battle-fields provided the manpower for cornfields, and vice versa, captive labourers permitted the creation of citizen armies. In the Capitalist Epoch wars serve a different function. Wars destroy and devalue capital. Wars, still, sometimes bring about the use of slave labour. During the Second World War the German Bourgeoisie's use of slave labour is well documented. Today in Africa's biggest country slavery is alive and well. In Sudan over the past ten years over 1,000,000 people have lost their life in the civil war. Also as a result of that civil war over half a million black women and children have been captured in raids on their villages and sold as chattel slaves. These slaves perform various roles. Women and children may become domestic slaves working in homes. They may become concubines. They may work in small-scale produc-

tion units or more likely work within agriculture. What we have seen in Sudan are the black peasant males of these areas being eradicated and the women and children being sold into slavery.

The treatment of these slaves is of course horrific. An ex-slave who recently escaped bondage from his Islamic masters in Sudan described three common punishments to slaves who were disobedient to 'Africa Watch'. "(1) 'The camel treatment', where a human being is wrapped around the belly of a dehydrated camel and tied there. The camel is then given water and drinks until his belly expands enough to tear apart the slave. (2) 'The insect treatment', where insects are put into the ears of the slave. The ears are then waxed shut. The arms and legs of the slave are bound. The person goes insane from the bugs running around in his head. (3) 'The burning coals treatment', where the victim is seated flat, with his/her legs apart. The slave is then tied in that position to the floor. When it is clear that the slave cannot move hot coals are placed between his/her legs burning his thighs and genitalia".

In quantitative terms slavery exists only as a residual phenomena on the outskirts of the most dominant mode of production. However the existence of this most barbaric treatment of man, by man, presents us with another ringing indictment of the capitalist system.

Slavery and child wage labour cannot simply be cut out of the capitalist system like cancerous tissue. Reformism is no longer an option. Only when the most dominant mode of production (wage labour) is superseded by the communist mode of production will all slaves be freed and children allowed a childhood.

The British Ruling Class and the Euro

The Danish refusal to join the Euro in the referendum at the end of September has refocused attention on the issue in Britain. The anti-European section of the ruling class has taken heart from the Danish vote while the pro-European claim it makes little difference. It is clear that the British bourgeoisie is hopelessly split on whether to join the Euro but must resolve the issue fairly rapidly, probably within the next 18 months. Behind this question, which is on the surface a relatively simple economic issue, lurk more contentious choices. The most important of these is the rebuilding of imperialist blocs and the necessity for Britain to choose between its post war alliance with the US and integration into a European bloc. The present "Mid Atlantic" position of the British bourgeoisie cannot be maintained for much longer.

Background to the Euro

The primary force, which has created the need for the European bloc, European integration and the Euro, is the capitalist crisis of profitability. The fall in the rate of profit has produced profound changes in the world structuring and organisation of capitalism in the last two decades. Capitalism has, to a large extent, broken out of the barriers of the nation state and is seeking to organise itself on a higher level. The massive increase in globalisation of production, the transnational concentration of capital and the resulting centralisation and increased competition, have produced forces which even the larger nation states of the post war era, are incapable of resisting. A dramatic illustration of this was the inability of the British and Italian bourgeoisie's to defend their currencies in the crisis of 1992 when both crashed out of the European Exchange Rate Mechanism. It is these forces which have propelled the

European powers towards political and economic union. By creating a closer union with a common currency and common economic management the European powers hope to create capital concentration on a European scale, increase labour productivity and to sweep away inefficiencies and waste associated with national currencies and some of the activities of nation states. Europe as a whole will also be able to fight for its economic and strategic interests.

The capitalist crisis which ended the post war reconstruction period in the early 70's also affected the Soviet Union (SU) and the eastern bloc. It was ultimately the inability of the SU to restructure and reorganise its capital, which led to its collapse in 1991. The sudden removal of the Soviet Union not only left its former satellites open to western capital, it left the US as the sole super-power with imperialist domination over the entire planet. While the SU threatened Europe, the European powers were happy to accept the secondary position accorded to them by US imperialism. Once this threat was removed it was inevitable that their own imperialist interests would no longer be compatible with those of the US. This has been illustrated, not only in the sharp Trans Atlantic trade disputes of the 90's, but also in the wars in the Balkans and the Caucasus, the Middle East crisis and US attempts to force Europe to respect its boycotts of Iran and Libya. The interests of European Imperialism have pushed the European powers down the road to union, and it is significant that the Maastricht Treaty, which marked out the path to the EU and the Euro, was signed less than a year after the collapse of the Soviet Union.

The EU represents the nucleus of a European bloc, which, though still in its infancy, will eventually rise to challenge US imperialism. The imperialist nature of the EU is a result of the na-

ture of capitalism itself, and therefore, irrespective of the wishes of its present leaders, it will be forced to confront its former protector.

In the longer term it will be quite impossible for the British bourgeoisie to maintain its "Mid Atlantic" position. The Euro represents one more chain tying Britain into the European bloc. A substantial section of the British ruling class has come to realise that once this chain is in place it will be impossible to escape further ties, and in due course full integration into the European bloc.

Aims of the Euro

The aims of the Euro are fairly straightforward. By constituting themselves into a large currency area the Europeans hope to achieve a zone of economic stability with the strength to ward off the type of disaster which struck the European Monetary System (EMS) in 1992. At present the Euro zone represent approximately 20% of the world's income, an amount slightly larger than that of the US itself. Within such a zone a common currency should vastly reduce trading costs, increase competition and efficiency. It should also encourage capital concentration via mergers in the common currency zone, make finance easier to raise by providing a larger pool of capital, and, of course, lead to equalisation of conditions of the working class. The last will be achieved by mobility and flexibility of labour, ending of restrictive practices etc. and erosion of national protection measures for workers which were won in the period of reconstruction after the war. In short working conditions will be equalised and an increase in the level of exploitation of the European working class will occur. Many of these aims have already been partly achieved and will be discussed below.

A further aim of the Euro is to challenge the international dominance of the dollar. It has been calculated that through its role as the world's currency for commodity exchange and loans the US gains something in the order of \$500 bn annually. This is achieved by the creation of dollar credit to supply foreign trade where the dollars will not re-enter the US economy. (For a fuller discussion of this see "Disharmony over the Euro" in IC 17.) If the Euro is able to partly replace the \$ in these areas it will be able to draw part of this massive amount to Europe. The US, for its part, supported the European project while the SU existed as it saw the EEC as a bastion of European opposition to its rival. Since the collapse of the SU the US has been more ambivalent to the European project and does not want to see the dollar's dominance challenged.

The longer-term implications of the Euro for the nation states, which join, are clearly a reduction in national powers and sovereignty. The sharing of a common currency represents a transfer of the national state's powers over monetary matters such as interest rates and money supply to the European Central Bank and the European Commission. Although powers over taxation and spending remain with the national governments these are constrained by the central monetary policy. Further measures such as tax harmonisation are under discussion and may be introduced in the Euro countries in due course. When these economic measures are added to the others which are under consideration such as unifying foreign policy and producing a common military force it is clear that real power is being removed to a European centre and national states relegated to an administrative role.

Has the Euro Succeeded So Far?

The Euro has produced a zone of monetary stability with low inflation and the avoidance of crises like that of 1992. It has succeeded in reducing trading costs and trade within the Euro zone is growing faster than that outside the zone. It has encouraged capital concentration within

the zone and major mergers of oil, communications, banking and other sectors of capital have occurred. Also massive mergers and acquisitions between capital inside and outside the zone have occurred. Vodaphone/Mannesman and Daimler Benz/Chrysler are two of the most spectacular examples. Of course, such mergers are part of a trend of globalisation, which has gathered pace over the last 2 decades, in which Europe is participating. (In every year since 1980 worldwide mergers and acquisitions have grown by 40%. In 1999 the value of completed mergers was \$2300bn equivalent to 8% of the world's GNP.) The Euro has also made the raising of capital easier and it has become the currency of choice for many bond issues. *The Economist* 17/9/00 reports that "The capital markets have taken to the Euro with a vengeance." The required structural reforms and labour reforms have also started taking place. The European bourgeoisie boasts that labour costs in the Euro zone are now more competitive than they have been since 1985. (See *Financial Times* 31/8/00.) This together with the weak Euro means that exports are booming and the Euro zone economies are growing more strongly than those outside the zone.

The principal failure of the Euro, which is pointed to by bourgeois commentators, is its 25% depreciation against the \$ in its first 21 months of its existence. This has led to the persistent capital outflow from the zone. In 1999 \$125bn left the zone and the figure so far for 2000 is \$55bn. Much of this capital has gone to the US, which, because of its robust growth, has maintained a strong dollar.

The strong dollar has helped the US attract capital to fund its enormous trade deficit with the rest of the world, which is at present running at \$1bn per day. Having a weak Euro has helped the dollar remain strong and it has helped the Euro zone economies rebuild themselves. Unemployment in East Germany, for instance, has at last started to fall and German exports to the US have never been stronger. Volkswagen, for example, has increased its exports to the US by 20% in the last 12 months. There are therefore specific

reasons for the low value of the Euro, which has suited the Euro countries, and the US. The reasons for wanting the weak Euro could, however, easily vanish and the tendency be reversed. In July a quarter of the US deficit, or \$7.2bn, was with the EU and any further weakening of the Euro will make this worse. The US cannot afford to run such a deficit indefinitely, and it is significant that in late September the US intervened to support the Euro to prevent a further fall. The US may have decided that it is not in its interests to allow the Euro to weaken further. The fact that the European bank raised interest rates yet again may indicate that the decline of the Euro is about to reverse.

The Euro has, of course, failed to challenge the dollar as an international currency and is unlikely to do so for many years and there can be no doubt that the US will continue to manoeuvre to prevent such a challenge. However, overall the Euro has succeeded in most of its aims and it is significant that other areas of the world are considering similar schemes. For example the South American Mercosur countries, Brazil, Argentina, Paraguay, Uruguay, Bolivia and Chile are having discussions about monetary union. Similarly 13 Asean countries, 10 members of ASEAN together with Japan, China and South Korea have agreed to pool part of their financial resources to reduce exchange rate volatility in a system rather like the European Monetary System, which preceded the Euro. This could well lead to an Asian monetary area and an Asian bloc opposed to both the US and Europe.

The British Bourgeoisie and the Euro

The British bourgeoisie suspects that an acceptance of the Euro will be an irrevocable step away from the post war alliance with the US. This will in turn lead to the collapse of NATO and all the certainties of the last 50 years. At the same time there is a reluctance to surrender sovereignty to Europe and nostalgia for Britain's former great power status. On the other hand economic forces are driving Britain into Europe. Hence the sensitivity

of the issue and the vacillation of the ruling class with the leading parties changing positions like shoes.

Broadly there is a division between those sections of the bourgeoisie who are internationalised and want to join the Euro and the petty bourgeoisie who do not, though exceptions to this division exist. Two campaigns have been launched, "Britain in Europe" which argues for joining and "Business

for Sterling" which argues against. Amongst the bourgeois political parties the Labour and Liberal parties favour joining and the Conservative Party is against. The Labour party has moved from a position of intransigent opposition in the early 80's to its present position where it speaks for international capital. The Conservatives, on the other hand, who actually took Britain into Europe in 1973, who signed the Single European Act in 1986

and the Maastricht treaty in 1992, have now adopted the populist "little England" position.

The pro Euro campaign, whose chairman, Lord Marshall is, significantly, also the chairman of British Airways, advance economic argument for joining. The benefits of the Euro, which have been discussed above, should, they argue, be extended to Britain. The Labour Party in a leaked document puts forward 4 reasons on which it will base its pro Euro campaign. These are, elimination of business transaction costs, price transparency and greater competition, elimination of exchange rate fluctuation, and finally, participation in a zone of macro-economic stability. Failure to join will damage Britain's economic interests and reduce direct investment. The pro-European faction, however, completely obscure the issue of political union, since it is unpopular, and pre-

tend that economic integration can occur without political integration.

The anti-Euro campaign bases their argument on the issue of sovereignty and the rejection of a greater Europe, as discussed above. They counter the economic arguments of the pro campaign with the ostrich argument that the economy is at present doing very well outside the Euro.

The most powerful voices to be raised for the Euro are those of global capital. Nissan, Toyota, Matsushita, Unilever, BMW etc. have all demanded that Britain commit itself to the Euro or lose further investment. The issue of direct investment has, in fact, been used by both sides and is worth examining briefly. Direct investment in Britain has consistently been the highest in the EU for the last decade. Although Britain remains the largest recipient of direct investment its share of the total is slipping. Whereas in 1998 Britain attracted 28% of the total coming to the EU in 1999 this had slipped to 24%. Correspondingly the share going to France rose from 12% to 18%. This would indicate that the warnings of Nissan and co. are being vindicated. This incoming investment is very important for Britain, since the country is a net exporter of capital. Britain is, in fact the largest capital exporter in the world. In 1999 Britain exported \$200bn abroad and only attracted \$82bn. (Unctad report). There was thus a net outflow of capital of \$118bn. This imbalance threatens the strength of the Sterling, which, though it has been buoyed up by high oil prices has recently begun to fall significantly against the \$. The bourgeoisie cannot afford to let incoming investment fall.

The majority of Britain's direct investment comes from the US. Throughout the 90's the US share of direct investment in Britain rose from 41% to 49% in 1998. The share of direct investment from the EU has declined from 32% in 1994 to 26% in 1998. The anti-Europeans argue that the direct investment from the US, which is so large, will be jeopardised if Britain enters the Euro, though why this should occur is not clear. US investment in the Republic of Ireland, for example, has continued to grow since the republic's adoption of

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the Euro for the reason that US capital wishes to export into the Euro zone.

The strongest argument for joining the Euro is derived from Britain's pattern of trade, 59% of which now goes to the EU. This is over 3 times that with North America, (17%) and double that with the rest of the world (24%).

The anti-Euro camp argues that national sovereignty will be lost and that Britain will become a province of a European Federation. In the long term this is probably what will happen. It must, however, be understood that much of the sovereignty the petty bourgeoisie eulogise about has already been lost. Globalisation of production and liberalisation of capital markets has meant that the national state has already lost the ability to set interest rates and control money supply beyond limits set by international financial capital. Globalisation has further made protection of national interests virtually impossible for a single second order state such as Britain. These can only be protected by a larger grouping of states. The actual nature of "National Interests" has also changed. Globalisation of production has produced such a penetration of foreign capital that it is no longer strictly correct to speak of "British Capital" and British Capital's "interests." What exists is a section of international capital, which is based in Britain. The City of London, for example, is totally dominated by US and German banks and 80% of activity on the London Stock Exchange is by international banks, none of which is British owned. Of the top ten exporters in 1999, 6 were foreign owned multinationals who together accounted for 56% of the exports of this group. Global capital has no concern for the petty bourgeois nostalgia about sovereignty. It is interested in profitability and if joining the Euro will increase profits this is what it requires.

It is also significant that some sections of international capital are already insisting their suppliers adopt the Euro. BMW, Unilever, Toyota etc. have all demanded that contracts with UK suppliers are in Euros. The Euro has thus started to be used as a parallel currency and it is estimated that in 1999 200 000 transactions were carried out in Euros.

Though this is still a small amount it indicates the direction in which the wind is blowing.

The strongest argument against the Euro is that the political union between the participating countries is too weak to ever effectively harmonise government actions and the Euro will thus be undermined by petty nationalist interests of individual states. This is undoubtedly true and it is for this reason that further political integration must occur.

The arguments and needs of international capital will determine the outcome in Britain. Although the petty bourgeois arguments of the anti-Euro campaign are at present supported by a majority, capital can always find ways to get the election results required once its mind is made up.

Implications for the Working Class

The whole European project is a project of the European bourgeoisie aimed at increasing profitability of capital and protecting their interests. Such a project could never benefit the working class in any way. Ultimately it is the working class who will pay for improved profitability. This is the real meaning of flexibility of labour, ending of restrictive practices, labour mobility, competition and so on which the Europeans boast they are achieving. The working class should not support any of the bourgeois campaigns, either for or against the Euro. These campaigns are part of the usual electoral fraud to give the ruling class the cover for what it intends to do anyway, and to say it is the "people's will." How the bourgeoisie organises itself is not an issue in which the working class should involve itself. The only reorganisation, which can benefit workers, is the abolition of capitalism and the organisation of production for human need instead of profit, i.e. communism.

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The only advantage, which can come from the European project, is the equalisation of conditions for workers within the area of the EU, which will

make it easier for future struggles to spread across the whole European area. The European bourgeoisie is thus, unwittingly, laying the basis for organising European workers on a wider scale — something, which will be indispensable for the overthrow of capitalism.

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Petrol Blockade — A Victory for the Bourgeoisie

The events of September 2000 in Britain represent a new low in the reactionary political scene on these islands. The unholy alliance of lorry firms, farmers and oil companies was the biggest threat to the rule of any British government since the miners strike. Sadly it had absolutely nothing to do with the working class and even less to do with the overthrow of the capitalist state.

Who were the people behind the “blockade” of the oil refineries? Collectively they were the ones who had successfully demanded the ending of higher income tax for higher earners. They were the backbone of the Thatcherite fiscal policy of cutting direct taxes (i.e. income tax) and transferring it to indirect taxation (i.e. VAT etc). They were the ones who benefited from this since they earned more than workers (many of whom pay none since they don’t earn enough). If taxation is on consumer goods it is obvious that “the poor” pay massively more proportionally. Now these bourgeois and petty bourgeois characters have had the nerve to say that there is too much tax on one of their favourite commodities — petrol and have “blockaded” the refineries in protest.

We put “blockaded” in quotation marks because, in truth, oil deliveries could have passed the opposition outside the refineries had they wished. The demonstrations were hardly mass pickets and they moved their vehicles onto the roadside when the police told them to. However since much of the transport industry is in the hands of private hauliers (some one-man bands) they actually assisted the protest by refusing to move. This was aided and abetted by the oil companies themselves (and if you want evidence why were the “protestors” fed from the refinery canteens and given parking facilities on the refinery car parks?), who were playing their own game. If tax is lowered on petrol sales then there is greater “elasticity” for them to raise

their prices and therefore garage forecourt profits without directing the anger of the mass of consumers towards themselves. At the moment the oil companies make £30 billions a year but little of this is at the pumps.

For their part a lot of these petrol protestors don’t really give a monkeys about petrol prices (the farmers pay only 3.13 p. per litre for “red” diesel compared to 48.82 for everyone else) but they are discontented about a series of problems. Some hill farmers are in desperate straits since the mad cow episode meant they could not sell their beef and many stock prices have collapsed. However this doesn’t explain the fact that the main farmers’ leaders in this action have been some of the richest arable farmers in the country (owning 1500 acres of prime arable land hardly puts you on the breadline). As they benefit from more subsidies (paid from workers’ taxes) than the coal or steel sectors ever did they are hardly the vanguard of the people. The petrol price issue, which in a society without adequate public services, hits ordinary working class people hardest, created the illusion that they were.

For their part, road hauliers were the pampered sector of the Thatcher era as she deliberately switched all major goods transport off rail and on to the roads so that class solidarity between miners and railworkers would not have made the miners’ strike effective. Today rail accounts for only 6% of the total amount of freight movement in Britain. Now these transport firms are worried that they will lose out to continental truckers who get cheaper diesel (and whose workers demonstrated that they could get the French government to back down). But in Britain most lorry drivers are owner-drivers or what Marxists would call “petty bourgeois”. It was this very class nature which made them popular with Thatcher. These were the same people who drove through the Liverpool dockers picket lines and are currently driving through postal work-

ers picket lines in London. In short these petrol tax protestors represent some of the greatest enemies of the working class in the last decade and a half.

We wrote at the time of the miners strike that “a defeat for the miners would be a defeat for us all”. After 15 years of unemployment, wage cuts, speed-ups and deteriorating working conditions right across the working class we are now seeing the further fruits of that defeat.

The Response of the Bourgeoisie

If analysis could not reveal the class nature of these petrol protests the reaction of the bourgeois press certainly did. Although the *Financial Times* (which represents the seriously big bourgeois interests) eventually came down on the side of condemning the protests (on the grounds that the rule of law has to be maintained in a “free capitalist” democracy) the rest of the press were not so sure about “democratic principles”. Pro-Labour papers, like the *Guardian* and *Mirror*, unsurprisingly also condemned the protests. The *Guardian* wrote that “These protests ought to be policed no less firmly than other disruptive activities”) the right-wing press was more ambivalent. Justifying the protests on the grounds that these poor farmers and road hauliers really “had no voice” the *Telegraph* and the *Mail* gave them whole-hearted support. The *Daily Telegraph* was particularly blatant. A week after denouncing the Jospin Government in France for having “cravenly caved in to the fishermen” since “every victory simply encourages more militancy” they were loud in their support for their class chums outside the oil refineries in Britain. There was no talk here of “holding the country to ransom” as we routinely got in the seventies and eighties whenever workers went on strike for wages

that kept in line with inflation. Nor was there any mention of the huge majority which the Labour Government holds in Parliament. This was "a people protest" and the Government was arrogant and insensitive. On the last point we might agree since Labour has increased poverty, and by spending less than even the last Tory Government has further undermined state education and the health service since it came to office. However as that is the very purpose for which the bourgeois press ensured they were elected there seems little point in their bleating about it now.

The Contortions of the Socialist Workers' Party

However when it comes to bleating the Trotskyist reformists have no competitors. Having told us to "vote the Tories out" at the last General Election they feign disappointment that the Labour party is not "socialist". Obviously this is a tactic to try to win away its more left-wing members but it only reveals that Trotskyism is alien to the growth of an independent working class movement. Worst of all the neo-Trotskyist cults is the SWP which has continued its general rent-a-mob analysis of the current political situation. Never mind the fact that these lorry drivers and farmers are the enemies of the working class the fact is that they are taking direct action. Their only regret is that the TUC has not followed suit.

Which only shows that Trotskyism, which long since abandoned proletarian politics, has absolutely no class basis whatsoever. Had they looked a little closer they would have noticed that the trades unions in Britain not only failed to call for a repeat of the French struggles, but that they were running around for the Labour Government trying to patch up deals with individual lorry drivers to ensure that oil was moved. Bill Morris of the TGWU was absolutely central to breaking the deadlock and negotiating with the oil companies to allow them to let convoys of tankers to leave their depots. A bizarre but revealing scene then when a trades union leader negotiates a resumption of work against the

strike tactics of the oil company bosses! But this only shows the role of unions today as agents (non-governmental organisations, if you like) of the capitalist state.

In this context what is required is class clarity, and none of the self-styled revolutionaries of the Trotskyist camp are capable of giving it because they are deeply embedded in the structure of the unions and capitalism itself. All they have succeeded in doing is further blurring the class boundaries. Revolutionaries in circumstances like this have to give a lead and the first task is to make a clear class analysis of what is at stake. By seeing something positive in the action of the farmers and lorry drivers (even if they saw that the movement was essentially petty bourgeois) the Trotskyists effectively abandoned any pretension to revolutionary class politics. In fact they don't see the world in class terms at all. By arguing that "the trades unions" rather than the working class should copy the oil protestors they once again demonstrated that they belonged to the camp of capitalist conservation. The trades unions are pillars of the system (as Bill Morris demonstrated over both this issue and over the dockers struggle). Only when workers act independently and against the unions to which they nominally belong can they hope to defend and advance their interests. Equally fantastic was the SWP's idea that the working class only had to copy the oil protestors and fight for them to be successful. It did not seem to occur to them (at least at first) that the state met the oil protestors with handshakes and cups of tea. Striking miners at Orgreave and elsewhere got an altogether different treatment!

For the SWP however this was "a tactic". Any struggle in their world-view is "a good thing" whatever the class content. For them any struggle might lead to further struggles involving the working class. But how, in reality, does an independent working class struggle arise? By demanding something different from the usual bourgeois reforms. This means that workers very quickly start to take up the slogans and political ideas of the communists. This, in its turn means that communists have to "openly proclaim their ideas". The

revolutionary consciousness of the working class does not arise in a direct and spontaneous line from economic demands. It arises through a much more tortuous process in which political ideas become intertwined with economic grievances. However for such an interaction to take place clear communist ideas have to be present in any struggle. Only a political party which has shed all the baggage of the past and which bases itself on the real lessons of the working class struggles of the past is capable of articulating both a vision of a classless society and the means by which the working class will attain it. Such a party does not make concessions to petty bourgeois movements but subjects them to merciless criticism precisely to clarify the real goal of workers struggle.

Today the SWP and the other Trotskyist groups have adopted the mantle of Bernstein. For them "the movement is everything, the goal is nothing". Which is why, like Bernstein they stand in the camp of the working class' enemies. A communist revolution can only arise out of a communist movement and a communist movement is the product of working class which is conscious of its own historical lessons and its historical task to liberate humanity. This means a working class movement led/guided/directed or what you will by a communist party and this is what we are working for.

The Postive Aspect

Despite our criticisms of the left wing of capital the current situation is not all one of doom and gloom. The fact that the struggles of the workers in France were taken up and copied by the petty bourgeoisie in Britain should not obscure the significant point that this was and is a struggle, which crossed national boundaries in a matter of hours. Such a phenomenon raises the rational hope that any future struggle of the workers themselves will, in these days of instant communication, pass quickly from one country to another. In 1848 the Communist Manifesto was hardly issued (and still less read) when revolution broke out in Palermo in Sicily. Within six weeks the news of this revolution has passed via Paris to Vienna

and then into Germany. Fifteen European capitals were engulfed in popular uprisings within two months. And Europe had only just acquired the telegraph wire as their only source of "mass communication". How much more can we achieve today with the internet? No wonder that, in the end the collective wisdom of the bourgeois press in Britain was that further petrol protests might be dangerous since they might encourage "trades union action". We can assure them that "trades union" and "action" is not only an oxymoron but that if there is real action then the working class will soon find the trades unions springing to the defence of the capitalist system. But at least the ruling class, if not exactly trembling, are a little nervous as the distant spectre of a working class united in rejecting capitalist exploitation. Sud-

denly panicky articles about the weakness of "just in time" production have appeared in the capitalist press since it give workers working in those industries too much power. Nostalgia for the enormous stockpile of coal which played such a critical part in the defeat of the miners in 1984-5 is already evident. It is clear that the bourgeoisie have learned from the events of early September. It is the task of the communists to make sure that the working class has absorbed its lessons too.

Jock

Our Basic Positions

1. We aim to become part of the future world working class party which will guide the class struggle towards the establishment of a stateless, classless, moneyless society without exploitation, national frontiers or standing armies and in which the free development of each is the condition for the free development of all (Marx): Communism.

2. Such a society will need a revolutionary state for its introduction. This state will be run by workers' councils, consisting of instantly recallable delegates from every section of the working class. Their rule is called the dictatorship of the proletariat because it cannot exist without the forcible overthrow and keeping down of the capitalist class worldwide.

3. The first stage in this is the political organisation of class-conscious workers and their eventual union into an international political party for the promotion of world revolution.

4. The Russian October Revolution of 1917 remains a brilliant inspiration for us. It showed that workers could

overthrow the capitalist class. Only the isolation and decimation of the Russian working class destroyed their revolutionary vision of 1917. What was set up in Russia in the 1920's and after was not communism but centrally planned state capitalism. There have as yet been no communist societies anywhere in the world.

5. The International Bureau for the Revolutionary Party was founded by the heirs of the Italian Left who tried to fight the political degeneration of the Russian Revolution and the Comintern in the 1920's. We are continuing the task which the Russian Revolution promised but failed to achieve — the freeing of the workers of the world and the establishment of communism. Join us!

Public Meetings

London

***Is Trotskyism
Revolutionary?***

**Artist's Room,
Conway Hall,
Red Lion Square,
Holborn,
2:30pm,**

Saturday 11th November

Newcastle

What is Anti-capitalism?

Seminar Room

Central Library

John Dobson Street

2.00pm,

Saturday 18th November

Sheffield

***Is Trotskyism
Revolutionary?***

SADACCA

The Wicker

7:30pm,

**Wednesday November
29th**

Internationalist Communist

Review of the International Bureau for the Revolutionary Party

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